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IN A PROMISED LAND.

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IN
A PROMISED LAND

A Novel

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. I.

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IN A PROMISED LAND.

CHAPTER I.

THE lower end of Castlegate is no longer the fashionable quarter of Marston. But seventy or eighty years ago, in the days before London had socially swamped the county towns, good families had thought it no scorn to dwell there, and good houses are to be found there still. Tall, dark, solid-looking houses, with long, square-paned windows, and a pediment over the door; inside, the rooms are wainscoted, and the window sills deep enough for seats. Behind, there may be a garden, shut in by high

brown walls overgrown with broad-leaved ivy, with a grass plot in the middle, and a gravel walk all round; at the end, perhaps, a sort of shrubbery clustering round one central tree. In such houses the contemporaries of Elizabeth Bennet and Emma Woodhouse sewed and painted and sang, drank tea, chatted, made their calls. Now, for the most part, lawyers and agents, local officials and warehousemen, there pass their dusty days. The windows out of which the Janes and Catherines of old may have watched for their admirers now afford a momentary distraction to a yawning clerk, or to the errand boy who, in an interval of business, chases a bluebottle across the grimy panes.

One of these houses, however, has found a different fate. There is little, outwardly, to distinguish it from its neighbours. The windows of the lower rooms are protected by the same grim, brown wire blinds as those of the estate-agent

below, and of the registrar's office above; only the brightness of the panes, the well-swept steps, the smoke curling from the chimneys, show it to be a place not only to work but to dwell in. Only, morning and evening, when the windows are open in summer, the dusty silence of the street is stirred by the shrill clearness of women's voices. It is a hymn they sing, set to some old-fashioned, high-pitched tune; and they sing it, though sweetly enough, in that rather nasal drawl which seems to characterize the devotional melody of the sects. But the inmates are seldom seen; their days are passed in almost conventual seclusion. Once a week, perhaps, a little troop of girls, in charge of an elder woman, may be seen passing down Castlegate in double file, to break rank for an hour in the meadows by the river, and then return. And when Sunday comes, the door into the outer world opens once more, and they are marched by narrow and retired ways to the little brick

chapel in an almost deserted square somewhere behind the gaol.

Few people, comparatively, even in Marston, are aware of their existence. The establishment appears in the list of local institutions. Now and then, in showing a friend over the town, one of the clergy, maybe, will point out "a school in which the Primitive Gospellers educate the daughters of their missionaries.'

It appears, on inquiry, that the sect has several mission stations in various parts of the world, but is little known at home. In Marston, at any rate, it has few adherents, and has never been known to make a proselyte. The subject seldom seems to possess any further interest for inquirers, whose curiosity, even if aroused, would probably meet with little reward. Meanwhile, the daughters of the Primitive Gospellers come and go—mostly at long intervals—all unnoticed; their life, with its humdrum or romance, withdrawn equally from

sight and speculation inside their cloisteral walls.

It was Saturday afternoon in early summer—mending time. But in virtue of its being nominally a holiday, the bands of discipline were, to a certain extent, relaxed. Therefore, instead of being ranged, stiff and silent, upon the backless forms at the ink-stained desks, the girls were sitting on the grass under the willow-tree at the end of the garden. Some had finished their sewing, and were half lying on their elbows in the shade, to the envy of their less fortunate companions, or strolling, linked in twos and threes, round the circular path. Now and then, one of the workers would plunge her arm ruefully into the large basket which stood in the middle, and draw out a pair of stockings, whose shortcomings she would proceed to exhibit at their worst to enlist public sympathy. And all the place was made cheery with a constant flow of chatter and girlish laughter.

The girls were of all ages, from seven or eight to nineteen. They were all dressed alike in a sort of uniform: cotton gowns, white as to the grounding and covered with a pale and uninteresting sprig, made rigorously plain, and fastened round the waist with a black leather belt; their collars and cuffs were of the demure, turned-down type worn by hospital nurses. All the younger girls had their hair kept short. It was not a becoming costume in itself, and only an exceptionally pretty or striking face could have resisted the general levelling effect which all uniforms seem to give.

Now, the average of the girls' looks was no higher than would be found in any unselected score or so of maidens in their rank of life. Such pleasantness as youth must always have for the eye, when accompanied by health, content, and ordinary intelligence, was to be found in plenty: fresh complexions, glossy hair, well-rounded figures, and features neither classical nor piquant,

nor anything at all but nineteenth century English—and English of the lower middle-class type. Thus it happened that any face which did rise above the ordinary standard became more noticeable, by a sort of surprise, than it might have been under ordinary circumstances.

One such face, however, could scarcely have passed unnoticed anywhere. Seated somewhat apart from the others, the centre of a group of little ones whom she was instructing in the mysteries of darning, was a girl rather older than the rest : she might have been two or three-and-twenty. It was no beauty of feature that attracted attention to her. Neither did she owe anything to colouring or figure ; she was not above the medium height, and was proportioned with that common-place correctness which is as far removed from beauty as from ugliness. Her hair, very smooth and straight, was a sort of pale straw-colour, her eyes a faint grey, and her complexion pallid rather than

white. Her mouth was disfigured by projecting teeth, but her teeth themselves were her only beauty, being exquisitely white, though large. It is true that nothing small would have seemed in keeping with this woman. For though plain and unimposing, her face expressed an amount of character almost startling in one still so young. It was, in fact, the face of an enthusiast ; of one of those enthusiasts who lead, not follow. It was entirely wanting in every possibility of humour ; there was no mobility about it, no suggestion of any great breadth of sympathy or interest : it had few capacities for passion. But it had infinite capacities for exaltation.

Indeed, the exaltation never appeared to be far off. Enthusiasm seemed to be so much the possessing, the permanent quality of this young woman's soul, that no common word or act could be quite so common and material with her as with everyone else. Whatever might be the intense monotony of her outward circumstances, however

limited her range, it was as impossible to think of her as ever being dull as it was to imagine her being amused.

She had been interrupted in the middle of some narrative by a difficulty of one of her pupils ; there was no trace of impatience in her manner when she broke off her sentence short to attend to the child's needs, though, from the indignant remonstrances of her audience, she seemed to be coming to a crisis in the story. In a minute or so she resumed, without any apparent loss of continuity or confusion of ideas. A certain spiritual luminosity, which her pale face took on, in place of any physical glow, when she was much moved, showed her own interest in the tale to be no less than that of her hearers.

"But when the savages saw that their prisoner was gone, they all came rushing to the missionary's house, yelling, and brandishing their spears ; and they cried out to him in their language, that he should bring the

woman out to them, because she was a witch and must not be allowed to live, or else all their cattle would die with sickness as Mbesa's cows had died. Then Mr. Martin came and stood in the door of his house and spoke to them and said: 'Friends, I cannot do this thing—and God forbid that I should if I could. The woman is not here.' Then they were much more angry, and they bade him say which way she had gone; but he would not, only tried still to turn their hearts, if he might. And some would have killed him, but others said: 'Not so; let us rather make him tell.' Then they ran upon him, and took him, and bound him with leather thongs till the blood started from his wrists and ankles, and so dragged him along the ground to the great place in front of the headman's hut; and for six hours they did their worst. I have not the heart to tell, nor you to hear, what he had the heart to bear. Six hours, and then he died."

"And did the woman get safe to the fort?"

"No; she must have missed her way, and two days later, a party of her tribe, coming back from some expedition, found her lying in the veld half dead with thirst and terror, and took her back, and she was put to death."

There was a pause; the children looked rather blank.

"Then it was all for nothing, and not worth while, after all?" said one, at last.

"Not worth while?" echoed the narrator, with a sort of surprise. "Oh, my dear," she began.

Her voice, rather deep, but not otherwise remarkable, became sonorous in moments of strong feeling; then, though not musical, it was not exactly unmelodious. It had taken this tone, now, but the sentence was cut short. A spare elderly woman had come out on the steps leading from the house into the garden; there was a little fluttering

hush among the girls when she appeared; they fluttered into silence, like canaries when a covering is thrown upon the cage.

"Sarah Bowman and Martha Williams," she called, "the mistress wishes to see you at once in the parlour."

A girl who had been lying on her back upon the grass near the workers, her arms beneath her head, her plain straw hat with its brown ribbon tilted half over her face to keep the sun out of her eyes, sprang up with a sort of start. The hat fell aside and revealed a face almost as noticeable for its beauty as the other was for its force. Not beauty of the most refined type, perhaps—black eyes, black hair, a brilliant complexion. On a larger scale it might have threatened heaviness or even coarseness; but this girl was so small, so vivacious, that this emphatic colour and brilliancy only gave a delightful childlike audacity to her appearance. In her prim, precise uniform frock she sparkled among her stolidly cheerful companions like

a cupid got astray among a flock of tombstone cherubs.

She stayed a moment to pick up her hat and smooth her hair.

"It can't be a scrape this time," she said, "as Sarah's in it. What will it be, girls?"

She did not wait for an answer; ten years' discipline had not been altogether lost upon her, and obedience, instantaneous and unquestioning, was one of the foundation-stones of the system. Sarah, moving to the summons with a military or, perhaps, monastic precision, was already at the foot of the steps when Martha caught her up. Nothing seemed less likely than any mutual attraction between these two, yet Martha—or Mattie, to give her the name by which she was best known to herself—slung her arm round Sarah's waist, and Sarah's look grew motherly, as it could, as she took the little hand. They passed through the deserted schoolroom—a room severely plain, the floor uncarpeted, the walls blank, the lower half of

the windows whitened for the restraint of wandering eyes,—and by narrow passages and unexpected steps reached the door of the parlour. Sarah knocked, and a woman's voice bade them enter.

Probably, neither girl was prepared for what she saw. The not very large room seemed, at first sight, full of men. As their eyes, after the first moment of surprise, began to convey juster ideas to their startled minds, they saw that the six members of the school-committee were assembled before them. Seated a little in front was a kindly-looking old man, the minister; and beside him, near a table covered with papers, the mistress.

The mistress of the Missionary School of the Primitive Gospellers at Marston was not an ordinary woman. Only to look at her you felt that she was born to be a trainer of enthusiasts, of fanatics if you will, and that the uninflammable temperament and admirable common-sense of the vast

majority of the girls who passed through her hands was, to her, at once a marvel and a constant mortification. Unable, of course, to understand her, her pupils stood in desperate awe of her; perhaps she had never won the love, as certainly she had never won the confidence, of any. Of all the girls with whom she had ever had to do, Sarah Bowman alone was capable of comprehending her; and Sarah, though youth and inexperience gave her something of the severe inflexibility which was inherent in Miss Grover's character, had yet an innate motherliness which found no point of contact or sympathy with the unqualified fanaticism of the mistress.

There was a short pause after the girls came in. They stood together near the door, conscious of scrutiny from many eyes which had, probably, never before realized the fact of their individual existence. Sarah bore the ordeal with self-possession, but Martha was visibly nervous. Her quick

colour came and went, her little hands moved restlessly, she pressed nearer to her companion, till she almost seemed to be leaning upon her. Sarah's eyes maintained the ordinary level quiet of their gaze, but Martha's sank and wandered, as seeking some escape from the silent criticism, which, indeed, seemed much less favourably inclined to her than to the elder girl. At last, Miss Grover looked towards the minister. It was almost comically clear that her deference was a somewhat grudging tribute to his official character, and not at all due to any sense of his personal qualifications for a task which, it is true, she would have fulfilled herself with much greater composure. The old man pulled some letters out of his pocket, and began to fumble with them ; the thin foreign paper rustled and crackled in his hands, tremulous at once with age and with a certain flurry.

"My dear young friends," he began at last, "we have sent for you on a matter of

serious importance. I have had a communication from Mr. Glasse, the minister in charge of our mission settlement at Beulah. You know where Beulah is?" he asked, as if glad to interrupt himself.

"In South Africa, sir," said Sarah. And now her even breath began to come a little quicker.

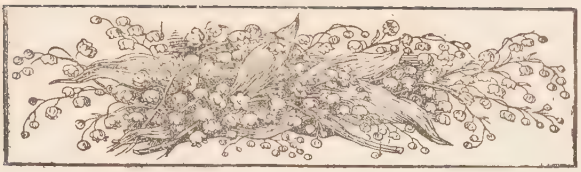
"An admirable climate and a most encouraging work," put in a member of the committee, consolingly; but no one heeded, and the girls did not even hear.

"Mr. Glasse writes to tell me that two of the younger brethren, his fellow-workers, have now arrived at an age and a spiritual condition in which it is advisable, for their own sakes and for the good of the work, that each should take unto him a wife. He therefore begs me to do for them according to our customs. My dear young friends, this custom is not unknown to you; you will, I am sure, receive our decision in a spirit worthy of your high calling—a de-

cision to which we have not come without much seeking of counsel, both from the Lord and from the brethren."

He paused a moment, put on his glasses, and made a feint of referring to the letter.

"Sarah Bowman, it is arranged that you shall go out to Beulah to become the wife of Samuel Arkwright; Martha Williams to become the wife of Jesse Runciman."



CHAPTER II.

No doubt, as the minister said, the girls had heard of this custom. But it had never chanced to be brought under their notice as an actual fact; from other schools girls had been so summoned, but not, in their time, from their own. But, after all, the effect of the announcement, when it was made about themselves, could scarcely have been other than tremendous, however often they might have witnessed the situation as spectators.

For some moments no one moved or spoke; then Martha broke the silence by bursting into tears. The committee looked variously awkward, as men must; the old minister, past the age of awkwardness, felt

really sorry for her. It did not exactly strike him as a dreadful thing that a girl should be suddenly plucked from the home of all her life and sent out into the great unknown, dependant for all future care and guidance on the utter stranger to whom she had been thus irrevocably consigned. This did not strike him as dreadful, because it was the custom, because he had never heard of its working other than well, and could not conceive that it should. And yet, remembering far-off days, he thought that perhaps such a girl had been deprived of something. His own wooing had been as little romantic as possible—evenings in the back parlour of a small shop; occasional Saturday afternoon walks along the banks of a singularly dreary canal; a bride neither bright nor beautiful, comely at most, and capable. He could not, even in imagination, recall having felt anything approaching to emotion in the whole course of the affair.

Yet even in missing this supremely un-

exciting, unromantic episode out of her life, he felt dimly that the girl had missed — something. For love will still be lord of all. He may be deprived of every kingly splendour, may fold his radiant pinions under broadcloth; for gems, and rose-crown, and cloth-of-gold, he may assume very humble and unbeautiful attire indeed. Through every disguise we own the magician still; and, looking back to the days in which he walked with us through the land, we know that they were not as other days are, and yet that other days are the better for their having been. And for Mattie they were not to be. No half-sweet, half-painful flutterings of doubt—doubt, at once, of her own heart and of another's. No memory of an hour—was it more looked for or more shrunk from?—in which a few halting words broke down the last of a feeble barrier, and bade the stream of two lives flow henceforth as one. The passage from maidenhood to matronhood lies through an enchanted valley,

or by a golden bridge across the misty gulf of dreams; and it is made *à deux*. Mattie was to make it across a mere literal ocean, and to make it alone. Her heart would never quicken to the sound of a lover's footsteps; her lips would never glow beneath a lover's kiss. Yet it was a heart so made for dainty flutterings; a mouth so formed for kisses. Of course, the good minister would have turned, quavering and tremulous, with horror and dismay at the bare idea that any regrets should have occurred to the girl on her own account. Her elders might be allowed, half bashfully, to glance at such a reason for tears; for herself, she could only be permitted to cry because she was startled. And, indeed, she was crying for nothing else. As once she had stood upon the threshold of life, so now, as suddenly and as involuntarily, she stood upon the threshold of womanhood, weeping; as little conscious of any reason for tears in the one case as in the other.

However, tears made the proceedings rather difficult. The minister began a few words of vague consolation ; but Miss Grover broke in with an impatience which years of laborious self-restraint left her all unable to disguise.

"Compose yourself, Martha Williams," she said. "Don't make me ashamed by having nothing to show for your training but such an exhibition of weakness. Now, if ever, it is time to put away childish things. Oh ! girl, with such a task before you, have you nothing better to greet it with than tears? What have you got to cry for, I should like to know ?"

"I don't know, ma'am," said poor Mattie, feebly, but with truth.

"Then dry your eyes and leave off, there's a good girl. Because it is so silly, you know, to cry for nothing," said a member of the committee, soothingly.

He was a round-faced, little man, with an expression like a good little boy in a

Sunday pinafore, and was known among his co-religionists, with a reminiscence of the "Pilgrim's Progress," as "'Opeful 'Ickman." By trade he was a grocer, and by condition a widower. His arts of blandishment had been learnt, perforce, in the nursery, among his five young children. They were not very successful, as a rule; but he knew no others. He had a nursery mind, by nature, and circumstances had developed it.

"Look at Miss Sarah," he went on, admonishingly; "*she* doesn't cry."

There was a sublimity of bathos about this remark which deserved more appreciative recognition than it obtained. Sarah did not cry! From the moment she had heard the words which were to change her life, she had stood like one in a trance, but a trance in which heaven is opened. Her hands were clasped in a sort of ecstasy; her eyes were fixed on vacancy, but their luminous pallor might have seemed a reflection from some vision of bliss ineffable. Now and then her

lips moved softly ; if all at once she had burst into inspired song—some lowly-exultant Magnificat, in which self was too much forgotten even to remember self-abasement —it would scarcely have seemed strange.

Mattie glanced at her, and cried rather more ; she was dimly conscious of an aloofness from every worldly consideration which put Sarah very far away from her. Miss Grover looked at her too.

"No ; as you say, Mr. Hickman, Sarah does not cry," she said. "Quite the contrary ; it almost seems as though she were glad." She spoke very slowly, very coldly ; the poor little grocer felt crushed without quite knowing why. Yet the sarcasm was as superficial as the coldness. For there was the strangest suggestion of repressed emotion in her tone. The heart knoweth its own bitterness ; the torture of some for ever insatiable craving wrung the underlying cry of those words from the Principal's set lips. But between those two women who so

thoroughly understood, and yet could not love each other, were such strong spiritual affinities that Miss Grover's voice reached Sarah at a height to which no other sound could rise. It reached her, but it did not bring her down.

"Glad!" she said, "should I not be glad? Surely my mouth should be filled with laughter, and my tongue with joy, seeing that He hath given me my heart's desire, and hath not denied me the request of my lips."

The others scarcely noticed how the Principal drew one carefully-measured breath. Yet it contained all the passionate rebellion, the bitter sense of injustice, of a cry: "And I, then, have I had no desires? no prayers?"

"Our prayers may be answered in judgment," said a member.

"I'm not going for to say as our sister's is a case in p'int. We must all 'ope not. Oh! yes, we must 'ope." But he spoke as one who knows that he is making too great

a demand on human frailty. "All as I'd be taken to say is as there be sech a thing as liftin' one up to cast one down. To cast one down," he repeated, bending his head slowly, in cadence to his words; he seemed to be mentally contemplating the operation with a satiated melancholy.

"I don't think—I really don't think, that our young friend meant any presumption," said the minister, pacifically. "I really do not think so, brother Noakes."

Mr. Noakes shook his head gloomily. He was a fat man, and when a fat man is gloomy he goes very far indeed.

"I 'ope not," he said. "I've said as I 'ope not. But the 'eart is deceitful; and if we may say of one poor wor-rum that it be frailer than any other, I should say as the 'eart of a young 'oman was special deceitful, and in nothin' more so than in this 'ankerin' after the work of conversion. I knew a case in p'int."

"Dear me!" said Mr. Hickman.

"I did that. There was a certain sister —call 'er Soosan—as was contracted to a chu'ch member in the town as I used to live in. They was soon to 'ave been made one. Ay! they was that," said Mr. Noakes, his gloom deepening into despondency. "But one Sabbath—ah, I mind it well—there came a stranger to meet'n' and sat 'imself down among the brethren. 'E was a sodger, and 'is goin's on was sech as you might look for."

"Ah!" said Mr. Hickman.

"Now this Soosan cast an eye on 'im, an' she was moved in spirit. That was 'ow she put it to me. I would say to the brother as she was contracted to—when 'e would 'ave reasoned with 'er, thinkin' it was lightness of mind. She felt a call, she said, to the work of 'is conversion. I—the brother, I would say—kind o' doubted; but she could talk—ay! she 'ad a gift of tongues 'ad Soosan—an' in the end 'e bade 'er go on an' prosper. Them was 'is words. It was a biddin' to go up to Ramoth-Gilead."

"Did she fail?" asked Mr. Hickman, quite anxiously.

"Ay; an' a worse jedgment nor that overtook her. She went an' married him."

Mattie burst into a hysterical giggle. She was not really amused; but the sepulchral solemnity of the narrator, the gloomy silence that reigned among the audience, affected her strained spirits with the reaction which is apt to come upon them at church or at a funeral. Sarah took the little hands gently in one of hers, and, with a soft firm pressure, subdued the threatened outbreak.

It is a strong soul that can bear to be dragged down from its soaring, by such an ineptitude as that story, yet keep the wings of its exaltation unruffled, the eyes of its aspiration clear. Sarah had never witnessed so clearly to the sustaining power of one concentrated enthusiasm, as she did then. The light had died out of her face, indeed, and she was very still; but she showed neither shame nor resentment at a story

which, she dimly felt, was only not an insult by virtue of its utter imbecility. To her it was not even given to see that it was funny; the dark wave of humiliation touched her lips, unbrightened by the smallest sunbeam of a smile. But even thus cold, the draught could not chill her soul.

The one person who thoroughly enjoyed that anecdote was Miss Grover. She always did enjoy anything that confirmed her in her supreme contempt for the understanding of the opposite sex, and she was in a mood to appreciate to the full any satisfaction that had a dash of bitterness in it. She would do nothing to help anyone out, though she saw that matters were practically at a deadlock. But just then a member, who had not yet spoken, but had long been listening with ill-concealed impatience, brought down a pencil on the table beside him with a sharp tap.

"It seems to me as how there's a deal of time bein' wasted," he said. "If so be as I

understood aright, we ain't been called here for a missionary meetin', nor yet for an experience meetin'. All this sort of talk is neither here nor there. Neither o' these young women ain't goin' out, so to say, as a missionary herself."

"Brother Peskett is quite right," said another member. He was a hard-featured, elderly man, with smooth black hair and sharp, light-coloured eyes. In social position he was a step higher than the majority, being an auctioneer in a small way of business; and at the meetings of the school-committee he held, virtually, the proud position of chairman — the minister, who nominally filled that post, being of no account. Robert Grinstead was an inborn tyrant; abject submission alone could conciliate him. Between him and Miss Grover there reigned a constant and deadly feud; if there was one creature more than another in whom an independent will was utterly revolting to him, it was a woman. He was

not at all a clever man, though his somewhat superior education deluded his colleagues into the belief that he was, and, intellectually, had no chance against the Principal, who, with a much more limited education, was a very clever woman. But he was her equal in obstinacy, her superior in staying power of nerve, and in mere argument he had one inestimable advantage over her. In a community where Scripture, in its narrowest and most literal interpretation—the authority of isolated texts, despoiled of their context, forbidden comparison, and quite uninformed by the general spirit of the work, was still, taken with these limitations, recognized as the one rule and standard of social life, Grinstead was able to take his stand on certain expressions in the Epistles, and defy Miss Grover to dislodge him. Her common-sense, at war with her traditions, felt that it was unfair—as, indeed, it was, for the texts were chosen with an arbitrariness, a disregard of consistency, even of common

honesty, which a Pope might have equalled, but could scarcely have surpassed. But, if only for fear of proving too much, she dared not put the argument on a wider ground, and could not contest it on the narrow one, she was routed, to all appearance, time after time; yet, when he was most certain of final victory, would appear unexpectedly on the flank or in the rear, and by some damaging onslaught, certify him that the work of subjugation was to do all over again.

When Grinstead set the seal of his approval on Brother Peskett's remark, that worthy butcher felt exalted in the estimation of the universe. His satisfaction, in turn, pleased Grinstead, who went on with even more decision than usual.

"If you come to that, I doubt whether Scripture would bear us out in permitting such an employment to women, even should they desire it."

"Deborah," said Miss Grover, "was a prophetess, and judged Israel."

"That," replied Mr. Grinstead, conclusively, "was under the old dispensation. We are not under the law, but under grace."

Miss Grover knew perfectly, beforehand, that he would say this; but it was a subject on which she never could decline the field.

"Philip, the deacon, had four daughters, prophetesses."

Mr. Grinstead's face expressed no sort of dismay; a little annoyance at her pertinacity, and a sort of wonder at her bad taste in alluding to what he himself certainly considered must have been a domestic affliction.

"We have no sufficient information," he pronounced, "with regard to the office of prophetess in those days. And it would be the height of presumption, in the absence of all evidence, for us to suppose for a moment that it was carried out in any way that could be at variance with the plain directions of the Apostle on the subject. If he would not suffer a woman to teach, we

may be quite certain that those young persons did not teach. I think no one will deny this."

No one did; and he went on.

"But that is not the question. We need not trouble ourselves about the fitness or unfitness of these two young women for that position, because it is not what is required of them."

"Oh, no!" cooed Mr. Hickman. "It is something so much easier and happier than that."

"It is not a question of ease or difficulty, far less one of carnal satisfaction," said the other severely. "One—to be a wife—is a woman's business, and the other—to be a missionary—is not. And I have no doubt that, in their own line of business, these young persons are quite competent."

"Indeed, sir, I don't think you have made our work look any easier," said Sarah, with half a sigh.

"No right-minded young woman *can*

find any difficulty in that position," he said, dogmatically.

"It is a very high one," said Sarah, quietly.

"It is a very natural one," he replied, and Sarah said no more. Perhaps her silence did not strike him as the result of conviction, far less of submission, for it exasperated instead of soothing him.

"It is the simplest arrangement," he said, impatiently, "a child could understand it. Here are two young men, who, if they are to labour to any purpose in the vineyard, must be set free from serving tables. For this cause they must take unto them wives. What will be the business of the young women called to this position? Clearly, so to order all carnal affairs that our brethren may give themselves wholly and undisturbed to the work of the Lord. To clean, to cook, to sew—what decently educated female could be unequal to such duties as these? There is nothing to make a sensation about in all that."

There certainly was not. If, in fact, the prospect was capable of being levelled to a more deadly flatness, toned down to a greyer monotony, not even Mr. Noakes knew how to do it. There was a pause; then Miss Grover said:

"Ah! well; I think they will find both Sarah Bowman and Martha Williams very fair cooks."

She said it in a tone which flustered the minister and chilled the blood in Mr. Hickman's veins. Grinstead raged inwardly; but Sarah's eyes met the Principal's. It was a look almost of rebuke, and Miss Grover turned aside from it.

"We will both try and do our duty, sir, whatever it is; won't we, Mattie?" she said. "To be the servant of a servant of the Lord is blessed work too."

"And a help-meet, a help-meet for him," said the minister. He had flushed a little, and spoke with more decision than was usual with him. "You must not forget that,

Brother Grinstead. Oh! my good friend, when, after forty years of married life, it pleased the Lord, in His wisdom, to take my dear wife from me, it wasn't the comforts that I missed—though my Mary had her full share of Martha's gifts, and I'm not saying that things have been so comfortable since. But it wasn't that; it was my true yoke-fellow in the work of the Lord; which may He make these, our sisters, to be to the husbands of His choice, and their husbands unto them." He paused a moment, then went on more calmly. "And I have no doubt that it will be so; no doubt of it. Mr. Glasse sends me a most full and affectionate account of the young men. Samuel Arkwright has been like a son to him for years, and Jesse Runciman must be one whom to know is to esteem—a labourer of exceptional power and zeal."

At this point Mattie began to dry her eyes, and ventured, through her dewy lashes, a glance which asked for further information.

The minister, much encouraged, referred again to the letter.

"Both young men are five-and-twenty years of age. And (though of course this is a matter of no real importance) my reverend brother, knowing that we can't quite expect old heads on young shoulders, has kindly added that neither is so unprepossessing in appearance as to inspire a foolish aversion."

"Beauty being deceitful, and favour vain, such an aversion would be something worse than foolish, in any case," said Grinstead pointedly, looking at Mattie, whose face had brightened considerably at this assurance. It was, to be sure, very negative praise. But since this poor Beauty was not, apparently, to be handed over to an unmitigated Beast, what should hinder her from picturing the unknown as a fairy prince? Her ideas of that splendid being may have been tolerably prosaic; no doubt they were; but no doubt also they

were, at worst, visions of something rather more sublime than she had ever actually met in life. And there, at the other side of the world, in a land strange beyond imagining, beneath strange stars, what might one not expect?

Martha's spirits, subdued merely by the momentary shock, began to rise towards a pitch unknown before. Miss Grover watched her with eyes of bitter scorn, but did not remonstrate again. Sarah looked pleased at the girl's returning courage; for herself it was not easy to guess what she was feeling; to all appearance she was absolutely calm.

"And now, my dear young friends," said the minister, "I will not detain you; you will be glad, no doubt, to think over this change in your circumstances by yourselves. I am sure you both feel quite rightly about this subject; no foolish flippancy, I am glad to see, no rebellious refusals. Settling in life is a serious matter for any young woman; every well-brought up one must feel it a

great rest and satisfaction when her older and wiser friends kindly consent to make all arrangements for her. Then she has nothing to do but trust them entirely. And when we think of the many dangers of choice, and see on what very insufficient grounds giddy young women so often make it, and so come to much misery, I'm sure you ought to be very thankful to be spared it."

It was curious how much more the men present, even those who had not Grinstead's objection, dwelt on the husband than on the missionary; whereas, to two out of the three women concerned, the work was what so filled the field of their mental vision that the thought of marriage became a mere unobtrusive detail, merely part of the necessary preliminaries. It was the work which Miss Grover had fretted to see so thrown away on Martha; it was the thought of the work that stirred Sarah's inmost soul with mingled joy and awe.

The girls made their courtesy and withdrew. As the door closed behind them a slight general movement ran through the room ; it was a movement of relief. All the men looked at one another, furtively, and each anxious not to be caught looking ; each was secretly trying to gather his neighbour's opinion of the affair—was this thing wisely done ? These men were sincere ; it was by no mere canting formula that the minister had described them as praying for guidance. But though they had enough of the courage of their convictions to act upon, they scarcely had enough to rest upon, without misgivings. For, after all, men can be courageous on much slighter conviction than is required to make them confident.

What most reconciled them to their own decision was Miss Grover's opposition. It was such a grand opportunity for paying off old scores—and the score the Committee had against their Principal was a heavy one, accumulated through many sessions of

persistent snubbing. That she had a prejudice against Martha was clear; there was scarcely a man of them all who did not think such a prejudice perfectly explicable on the part of a hard-favoured elderly spinster towards a young and very pretty girl who had got a husband. Mercifully this interpretation of her conduct never once occurred to her as possible.

If, after all, Mattie should be a little weak, a little flighty, even—and Miss Grover had not hesitated to affirm that she was both—the defect was venial, indeed, in a little beauty, and the most orthodox of all remedies was at hand. So there was no one to contradict the minister when he said, as he rose to take his hat :

"Yes, my brethren, I do think we are doing the best possible thing for our young friends, for both of them, but more especially for Martha Williams. From all I can learn Jesse Runciman is the very man of all others to whom we may most hopefully

commit a young woman of good principles and warm affections, whose only failing seems to be a little want of strength and balance. Because, if there is one thing more than another for which this young man is particularly admirable, it would seem to be just his steadiness and strength of principle. Nothing could be better."

And they all agreed that, indeed, nothing could be better—for Martha Williams. What it might be for Jesse Runciman did not seem to occur to anyone.

CHAPTER III.

THERE followed a time of what would have been confusion in any ordinary household; but in the school in Castlegate nothing was ever allowed to amount to that. Still, the course of life was somewhat quickened, new and strange incidents broke the monotony of the daily routine. Such incidents! The arrival of a couple of modest travelling trunks; the stoppage at the door of the big draper's cart with mysterious packages; the suspension of the ordinary school sewing in favour of the articles needed for the outfit—an outfit in which the emigrant was more considered than the bride. As these girls were to know nothing of the springtide joys

of wooing, so neither were the pretty butterfly vanities of the trousseau to be theirs. So simple were the preparations, so admirable the organization, that in three weeks from the day on which they had been summoned to hear their fate, Sarah and Mattie were ready to start.

Then came a dreamlike time when everything was new. The very journey to London was an event exciting enough to dry Mattie's farewell tears in a very short time. She had cried, of course; not very passionately, but quite sincerely. Little home-like as it was, the school had been all the home the girls had ever known, and if it had not much hold on their affections it had on their confidence. There was the sacred security of custom about it.

The summer sunrise was but just gilding the weather-cocks on the church steeples when they left Marston, and London was scarcely more than warming up to its day's work when they arrived. But to the girls it

seemed a wild and desperate confusion, amidst which they clung to the elderly deacon who had been sent to take them across London and down to Southampton, as to a pillar of strength.

This gratified him very much, because he was really a nervous, fussy little man, to whom porters and flymen were accustomed to pay but scant respect, whom policemen patronized and officials snubbed. To have these two creatures, even so much more helpless than himself, depending on him, gave him a sense of importance and of dignity as new as it was beautiful.

And Mattie, at least, was ostentatiously and demonstratively dependent, and she looked very pretty so, and fluttered charmingly. Mattie was the sort of girl whom a young man of a certain stamp would greatly enjoy escorting through a field of cows. Brother Trigg was not a young man, by any means ; but he was not so old either, as to be insensible to the agreeables of the

situation. It was decidedly agreeable to have a pretty young woman thrusting her head out of the fly to follow his every movement, as he collected the luggage, with the most obvious anxiety not to lose sight of him; decidedly agreeable to hear her exclaim in a gush of gratitude: "Oh! I was afraid you had gone away and left us, and what should we do in this dreadful place alone?"

She had her head out of the window half the time, shrieked very musically whenever she feared a collision—which was pretty often, asked a hundred questions, most of them so amazingly ignorant that he could not help showing as a prodigy of general information by comparison, and altogether fairly won his heart.

Her spirits lasted well through the short journey to Southampton, and even to within sight of the docks. But then, all at once, as the shipping came into view through a gap, and Brother Trigg pointed out a certain steamer as that by which they were to go

(it was the wrong one, but that was a detail), a sudden terror fell upon her, and struck her dumb. It was not he that could give her comfort now ; she turned to Sarah, and read the awe born of a mighty crisis reflected in her face as though from Mattie's own.

The two girls stood hand in hand near a gangway, while their escort fussed hither and thither, trying to discover which was the right steamer. Now that it had become practically important to ascertain this fact, he felt many degrees less sure of it than he had done five minutes before. He was smitten, moreover, with a sudden paroxysm of incredulity, which forbade him to rest satisfied with any one answer, however authoritatively expressed. The girls were scarcely conscious of his absence. They stood exchanging nervous pressures, but never a word ; for what was to be said when they did not even know how they felt? Crowds came and went about them ; the air was vibrant with the shouting of sailors and dock-labourers, the

clatter of trucks and drays, the rattling of chains, the labouring gasps of pent-up steam. The confusion around them added to the confusion within : regrets, hopes, fears, exultation quickened their pulses and shook their souls. The swell of the full tide of the ocean of life began to send such tremors through their being, as the swell of the salt billows sends quivering through the bark newly launched upon their bosom.

At last, Brother Trigg returned from his voyage of discovery.

"This 'ere's the mail, after all," he said, in rather an injured tone, pointing to the steamer near which they already stood. "I could have found out this long while since, but everybody one speaks to seems clean off their 'ead with 'urry and worry. There's no getting a sensible answer, let alone a civil one. It's 'orrid the way things is arranged at these places—shove 'ere, and scramble there—a reg'lar scrimmage. Why can't they begin to get ready in good time, so 's not to

'ave all this fuss? There's nothing more 'indering in the end than 'urry and fuss. 'More 'aste, worse speed,' that's my motter. Mind that, Miss Mattie; you look to me, and keep quiet, and you'll be all right. Now then, where's them umbrellas? Eh? I took 'em out of the train? Everything *I* took out I put together in a 'eap. Then they're stole! Police! Where's the police? Nowhere, *of* course. Oh, sir, 'ave you seen— Bless me, there they are, behind that packing-case. All right, sir. And now, my dears, if you've got all your traps, we'd better be going on board.'

As they set foot on the gangway, the steamer gave an unearthly shriek. Brother Trigg sprang back with agility.

"Oh, it's going! I'm sure it isn't time! 'Urry, Miss Sarah! 'urry, Miss Mattie! Stop!" to a sailor on board, who happened to lay a hand on the rail of the gangway, "you mustn't take it up yet; these two are going to go! Good-bye, my——"

At this moment he discovered that there were no signs of a move, and with a temporary return of the calmness he so much commended, he went up and joined the girls on deck.

His nervous dread of being carried off to a land which he pictured to himself as inhabited entirely by savages, and roamed over by lions, tigers, and the boa-constrictor, kept him standing as close as possible to the entrance of the gangway, where he was very much in the way, and attracted much uncomplimentary notice from the passers to and fro. But he was accustomed to execrations in public places, where his talent for getting in the way was something exceptional, and they did not ruffle him in the least.

"You'll mind and give my respecks to the Reverend Glasse when you see 'im—Brother Trigg's respecks, and I 'ope 'e's got 'is 'ealth. It's a long way for you to be going by yourselves, to be sure; but they do say Africa's not such a bad climate as

some—not, as you might say, right down poisonous. I do mind 'aving read in one of them missionary tracks of a part they calls 'The White Man's Grave.' There was a little print to it with palm-trees and long flat white things; but whether they was tombs or 'ouses, I couldn't say. But I gathered that part wasn't just where you're going; maybe it's as much as a 'undred or two 'undred miles away. Of course, being as it's Africa, it must be 'ot; but you mind whenever you go out of doors, and just put a cabbage-leaf inside your 'at, then you needn't ever be afraid of sunstroke. Simple, ain't it? but it's first-rate. 'Twas Mrs. Trigg's father as told me. 'E's a market-gardener, and last August Bank-holiday we was spending the day with 'im at 'is 'ouse in 'Ammersmith, and 'e showed me 'ow it was done. You just pick your cabbage-leaf—as it might be this 'andkerchief—and you take and put it in your 'at, so——"

At that moment, as he stood with his

arm stretched out, hat in hand, much as if he were about to do a conjuring trick, some hasty passenger, hurrying on board, for time was getting short, jerked the hat out of his hand, and sent it spinning down the gangway. Before he could do more than utter one cry of anguish, it was rescued by a young man coming up. With an almost languid leisureliness of motion, contrasting strongly with the general rush of movement round him, he strolled up the planks, restored the hat to its owner with the shadow of a bow, let his glance rest for one half-interested second on the girls, and passed on. A rapid observer might just have gathered that he was a gentleman, and that he was there under protest; no more. But a girl's eyes, which see little in most directions, see a good deal in one—Mattie could have told that he was good looking.

But now the order to clear the ship is given; newsvendors and fruit-sellers in haste, friends and relations lingeringly, begin

to stream down the gangway; the thinned ranks left behind press to the side; there is a moment when quay and crowds seem gliding noiselessly away from the apparently motionless vessel; then motion grows perceptible, more pulsating, swifter. One look, and faces are still distinct; the next, though given with eyes hastily cleared of blinding tears, forms alone are to be recognized. But already these are lost in a mere dark irregular line; and then those may weep who list, for there is no glimpse left which tears might lose.

Sarah and Mattie sank down side by side upon a bench, and cried with little restraint. The social traditions of that rank of life exact no very Spartan repression of emotional exhibitions, and theirs were not the only undisguised sobs to be heard on board.

Of course, however, the passengers to whom a voyage to the Cape was still in any sense a sentimental journey, were in the

minority. Of the majority, many were colonists born, returning home with only such mild regret as attends the end of a pleasant holiday. These were first-class passengers. Coming down lower in the social scale, there were various specimens of "our Mr. Jones," by whom a trip or two from Africa to Europe in the course of the year was scarcely more thought of than a journey from London to Liverpool by their brethren of English commerce. These were noticeable among the rest by their robust cheerfulness and old-traveller airs; and these, too, were among the last to cease to attempt communication with the shore. But, indeed, with one or two exceptions, all the passengers, whether they had friends on shore or not, seemed equally loth to quit the side. Distractions do not abound on an ocean voyage, and it is prudent not to lose a moment of looking at any outside object, having regard to the long days when there will be nothing but sea and sky to look at,

and even a flying-fish will be hailed with delight.

Exceptions, however, there were, and among them was the young man who had saved Brother Trigg's hat. The vessel had scarcely begun to move before he left his place among the watchers and established himself in a corner of the second-class deck.

The card attached to his deck-chair announced him to be Mr. Gerald Blake, and this, in law and fact, was his name. But, so far as his Christian name went, it was seldom indeed that he had the pleasure of hearing it. Indeed, a great aunt, now dead, who objected to abbreviations on principle, was the only person who had ever used it. All the other members of his family called him Gery; and among the many grudges which this young man bore to fate, this ill-treatment of his Christian name was not omitted.

For it must be owned that Gery is a name

that does not lend itself well to romance, in any case; and the tone in which his family pronounced it was, as a rule, the reverse of romantic. It was but too often coupled with the significant word "again." "Gery again!" Consie Blake would exclaim to her sister, when the dining-room door had banged behind the master of the house, at the end of a breakfast during which everything and everybody had been stormed at, from the toast to the schoolboy son who had injudiciously chosen that opportunity to ask for a tip. And Cissie would sigh: "I hate the very sight of foreign paper! I wonder if he has started back yet, or whether papa will be able to pass him on. Not that it will make much difference to us, in the end, either. Consie, when you are ready, we had better go up and look at those old tennis-frocks, and see what *can* be done with them. Because it will be no use asking for any more, with Gery to be set going again."

The Blakes' was a motherless household, or there could scarcely fail to have been one voice which had inflexions tender enough to make even the name of Gery sound melodious. As it was, there is no doubt that, so far as his own family was concerned, Mr. Gerald Blake belonged to the number of the Great Unappreciated.

So it came to pass that this afternoon he was feeling himself a profoundly injured man. Nobody had pressed him to stay; nobody had cried when he went; and his father had flatly refused to give him a first-class passage out. This was the crown of his wrongs; and as his looks of languid disgust wandered round the second-class deck, he felt everything human he beheld to be alien to him.

Before long even the poor consolation of comparative solitude was denied him. As they got further out to sea, and the coast-line sank into a long stretch of insignificant cliff, his fellow-passengers came away from the side and began to establish themselves each

according to his or her ideas of comfort, all about the deck. It was a full steamer, and Mr. Blake soon considered himself crowded out. With as much indignation as though he had chartered the whole vessel for himself, he went down to his cabin. As he approached it, a sound of alternate whistling and singing, which he had noticed almost from the top of the companion, became very pronounced indeed; and now he caught, with it, a sound of vigorous movement.

"Never come back no *more*, boys!
Never come back—no—more——"

Here there was a break, filled up by a rapid succession of kicks, as though a bag or portmanteau were being cleared out of the way. Then the tune was taken up in a whistle, and the accompanying movements became less marked. By this time the astonished Gerald had arrived at the conclusion that the sounds proceeded from his own cabin; he had been pausing for some seconds outside, thinking he must

have mistaken the number. Now he knocked, with some temper, and went in.

> " . . . . bar up the old shop door !
> We'll make some excuse
> And go to———"

At this suggestive and not too well-omened point of his ditty, the singer broke off to look round. He was a man who, at first sight, gave an impression of filling the whole cabin, and being cramped in it too.

"Oh, it's you, partner, is it?" he said, calmly.

"I've been clearing round. I should judge you were a new hand at that sort of thing ; don't know how to make the most of your stowing room. Eh? But now I'm through I reckon there'll be room for a little 'un—even with me in the diggings."

He laughed with a roll like thunder, or the bass notes of a bull. And, in spite of his disgust at discovering what kind of a

companion fate had provided him with, Gerald Blake, looking round the cabin, could not withhold a certain grudging admiration.

Blake had left every available surface littered all over with his own belongings. He was perfectly aware that he would not have the cabin to himself; in point of fact, he was the intruder, the one berth having been taken before he applied for his passage at all. But that was a mere detail, which could have no practical bearing on his own arrangements. Now, wherever the things might have been put to (and experience soon convinced him that all really needful articles were wonderfully close at hand) the place had been made not only clear, but tidy—with that rough sort of tidiness which every practical man comes to at last, however little moral beauty he may see in it, in the abstract.

Of course, Blake felt that his companion had been taking a liberty. Still, a liberty that saved him trouble was an offence he

could condone. He muttered something which might have been either apologies or thanks, and began to search for his match-box among the knick-knacks which had been bestowed in the rack above his berth. It should be unnecessary to say that all his belongings were in a style equally ill-suited to his surroundings and to his means. This last mattered comparatively little, as none of them had been paid for. The bills for them were still among the pleasant surprises he had prepared to keep his memory green among his relatives. And for all this, he really could not help wondering, with a sort of mental smirk, what impression the general style of his possessions had made on one whom he was pleased to consider a simple-natured barbarian. If he could only have known what exceedingly correct and accurate conclusions the simple-natured barbarian had, in fact, drawn from his observations, he would certainly have felt less satisfied, and might have been more discreet.

"You see, I've pegged out your claim at the top," said the man. "I always take the bottom berth; it's no joke for the neighbourhood when I try a jump at close quarters."

"I should think you would find it close quarters even for sleeping, let alone jumping," said Gerald, condescendingly.

"Well, there's not so much room as there is on the veld, no doubt," said the other. "I've known better quarters, and I've known worse."

"Of course. When one knocks about the world much, one must expect to have something to put up with. I've always found it so myself, anyway."

Under their overhanging brows the eyes of his companion gleamed with a grim humour. But all he said was:

"That's so."

He put a few finishing touches to his arrangements.

"Now that's done," he said, "suppose

we come and liquor up to the success of the partnership ? "

Gerald had not the slightest inclination to do so, but secretly he was sick already of his own society, and he assented.

CHAPTER IV.

When his companion drew himself up with a stretch and a shake, from stooping over his baggage, Gerald could see what a singularly powerful-looking man he was. His height, though, in reality, above the average even of tall men, scarcely attracted special notice, so well was it carried off by the breadth of his shoulders and the massiveness of his limbs. In age, he seemed between forty and fifty. His hair—very thick and shaggy, and hanging over his brow in a way suggestive of the mane of a bison—was already touched with grey. But most likely this was the result of those years of exposure to sun and storm which had given him much of the weather-beaten appearance of a sailor or a

gipsy. The lower part of his face was partly concealed by a short but thick beard.

They went into the saloon and gave their orders at the bar. The elder man signed his name on the order-card in a handwriting which Gerald could see half across the counter, "T. Westoby;" a hand which the amount of character it suggested alone saved from being stigmatized as that of one entirely illiterate. They sat down by one of the tables; Gerald took up a wine-card and began listlessly looking through it.

"They don't half understand this sort of thing on this line," he said, with a sort of superior resignation. "What is one to do in the tropics? On the American lines they do at least understand drinks."

"You've been in America, then," said Westoby. "And what sort of a location is that, now, to your thinking?"

"A beastly hole," said Gerald. And having thus summarily disposed of that continent, he ceased.

"And what part might you happen to have been in?"

"All parts, more or less: San Francisco, Canada, Tennessee, Florida. It's all the same—one gigantic swindle. I just wish the parents and guardians who are always being caught by advertisements for openings, could know the real state of the case. There's nothing to be done out there; nothing at all.'

"Some fellows seem to have made their pile, too," suggested his companion.

"That may be. But, you see, there are things a gentleman can't quite do."

He spoke in a tone so penetrated with outraged morality that it cannot be supposed that work was among the things he implied to be impossible for a gentleman. Nevertheless, the man opposite him seemed but little impressed.

"Well! it's likely I don't understand much about that," he said, with a grin, which suggested an honest pride in his ignorance.

"They had a saying in my parts, when I was a young shaver, that: 'A cat in mittens catches no mice;' and I reckon there's truth in it, in more ways than one. As for the Loblolly Land where buttered rolls drop off the trees into your mouth, and pigs run about ready roasted, with knives and forks sticking in their backs—*that*, it's true, I never found, and, what's more, I never expect to find it; and, what's more still, I'm blessed if I want to."

"Yet I have heard of fortunes being almost picked up, so to say, out in Africa," said Gerald. He had none of Westoby's objection to an Earthly Paradise.

It was well in his companion's heart to say: "Oh! have you? you precious young fool! Picked up! Neither there nor anywhere, and don't you make any mistake about it."

But though Westoby undoubtedly possessed a fine, warm, not to say explosive, temper of his own, it was really a very great

deal more under his control than it was popularly supposed to be. Seldom, indeed, did he let it loose without calculation.

"Tere *are* folks born with a silver spoon in their mouths, no doubt," he said, but not encouragingly. Nevertheless, his watchful, twinkling eyes never lost touch of Gerald's face, and their expression was neither that of his manner nor of his voice. "But it isn't everyone that is, and those that aren't must work; there's no way out of it. Do you know what that silver spoon is?"

"I suppose it is the same as to say that a man has luck," said Gerald, with a sigh which was meant as a slap at Fate, who had denied it to him.

"You've not hit it this time," said Westoby. "May-be that's what folks mostly mean by it, but it wasn't my meaning; luck's a notion I never held much by myself, that's a fact. It never did anything for me, nor I never asked it; and, as for

other chaps—those that I've heard swear at it, might mostly have begun cursing nearer home, and I never knew one bless it yet. Other chaps praised it up for him, but the lucky dog himself began nearer home too. No, what I meant was something nobody has two minds about the good of; and *if* a chap has it. But there's not much going, you bet."

"What is it, then?" asked Gerald. His attempt to conceal a reluctant curiosity could scarcely have deceived very much duller eyes than those grey ones, alert in ambush.

"Capital, partner, a few hundred pounds of capital; that's the silver spoon for those parts. But, as I said, it's precious scarce; none the worse for that, though, for those who have it."

Gerald made no answer. Westoby filled up a moment of acute watchfulness by a prolonged draught from the tumbler before him. He set it down with a sort of jovial clang, and threw himself back in his chair

till it creaked beneath the weight of his huge limbs.

"Not so bad, after all, to my mind," he said, drawing his hand across his mouth. "When you've served as many years apprenticeship to Cape Smoke and Boer Tobacco as I have, there's precious little in that line of bread-and-butter you'll care to quarrel with."

Gerald's face expressed all the disgust his companion could have hoped.

"You don't seem to fancy the notion," he went on. "Do you know how long it has been with me? Man and boy, I've been working up and down the country nine-and-twenty years. And now I'm bound to keep on, whether I like it or no; that sort of life takes the shape out of a man for anything else."

"I don't see why it need if it doesn't go on too long," said Gerald, with a touch of nervousness.

"Maybe not; but that's just where it is—

it always *does* last too long. I knew a young chap," he went on slowly—he was drawing upon his imagination, but it sounded the same as though it had been upon his memory; "I knew a young chap, about ten years ago; as likely a young fellow he was, when he came out, as you could see. His guv'nor was rather a big boss at home; but they didn't hit it off together, somehow, and one day there was a big thing in rows, and this chap had to quit; so he came out to our parts. He wasn't one to shirk, he'd turn his hand to anything. When I knew him he was serving in a store by Vryburg; I was trading up that way then, and it was the place I used to bring my show to. You may have fancied I'm not much of a judge of what your lot calls good form; but I do know good breed in a chap when I see it, and I saw it in this one—then."

He paused before the last word, just long enough to force attention.

"Why not?" said Gerald, sharply. "I

should suppose that would be as easy a thing to see as it would be hard to get rid of."

"Hard to get rid of, you think," repeated Westoby. To Gerald his tone sounded sardonic. "Easier than you think for. Three years after, I came across that chap again. He was a private in the mounted police. That's not a step up; he hadn't taken it because it was either, you bet. But there's steps lower, too."

"One needn't take them."

"Oh! of course not. And, likely, it was just this chap's own choice that brought him to be a dock-labourer, by Cape Town, with a nigger missus and a lot of piebald picaninnies in a hovel. Some fellows throw up the sponge so soon; yet I shouldn't have thought he was that sort, either."

If the implied moral of this anecdote slightly contradicted the speaker's previously announced theories, the hearer was in no mood to be critical. For in his heart he

felt too well that, for him, to bully fortune was as morally impossible as to succumb to her was fatally easy. He had proved it, indeed, already; but the full possibility of horror which lay in defeat had never been so crudely put before him as now.

"You said, just now, that with a little capital——" Gerald broke off.

"Oh! that, of course," said Westoby. But in the easy indifference of his assent, merely abstract in tone, he said more plainly than in words: "But what's the good of that to poor devils like you and me?"

He rose and shook himself; it was a habit with him after having been seated, and probably arose from the constraint consequent on a posture so unnatural to him.

"If you care to see the last of the old country," he said, "we should be just about sighting Portland now. No more land after that till Madeira." And thrusting his hands into his pockets he lounged out of the saloon and went on deck. There he attached him-

self to an old Colonial acquaintance whom he had discovered among the passengers. It was not his policy to favour Gerald with a longer interview just then.

Gerald had little enough wish for one. He came and stood among the others, and his eyes were fixed mechanically upon the far blue promontory fading every moment, but his thoughts were elsewhere. Not far off, Mattie, divided between the sentiment due to the old life and the excitement breathing from the new, withdrew her tearful gaze now and again from the shore to dart curious glances in his direction, feeling very much as if she were guilty of looking about her at meeting. She noticed how handsome he was, and she looked again and noticed how nicely his clothes fitted. And then she looked back at Portland, and cried afresh to think how frivolous she was; and then, somehow, she fell to wondering how *he* felt, and before she was aware she had stolen another glance. She decided that he

looked melancholy, as indeed he did. Handsome and melancholy: how many girls ask more, at nineteen, of a hero of romance?

Gerald Blake himself, that afternoon, felt anything rather than heroic. His mind was filled with two images. One was that of the legendary aristocrat in the novel. Gerald did not know that he was legendary; and it is true that he was fairly typical of a certain class of failures. There had been enough general truth in the narrative to give a grim substantiality to this otherwise shadowy bogie. Gerald had seen too much of the world to have been frightened by an impossible legend, and he had been seriously frightened by this one.

The other image, which lighted up the night of his depression with a gleam of hope, was that of the five hundred pounds which his father had solemnly assured him should be the last farthing that would ever again be spent on what his daughters called "setting Gery going again." Gerald had

told himself that he disbelieved the threat; that when this sum had gone the way of many previous sums (a way known clearly to no man, not even to himself), more would be forthcoming again as, spite of grumbling, it had been before. But he had not really convinced himself. He knew how greatly the estate had deteriorated in value; he knew that his sisters were come to marriageable age, that two of his brothers at least must soon be, in their turn, started in life, and that these two were by no means the whole of the family. It occurred to him—as an injury, of course, but still as a fact—that under these circumstances it was probable that a man really might refuse to start any given one of his children more than five times over; and, when driven to accuracy, this was the number of new beginnings to which Gerald was obliged to own.

The question, therefore, became a pressing one, how to invest his capital so as to

combine the maximum of profit with the minimum of work. A person who starts on this principle is not likely to be coldly calculating as to the matter of security. Sometimes such an one has luck, and they call him a brilliant financier; sometimes he has not—and they call him a fool. But whether laurel-wreath or cap-and-bells awaited Gerald at the goal remained to be proved. Abstract morality apart, perhaps it was not altogether ill for the temporal interests of this puppet, that it was Westoby who already held the strings which were to regulate his dancing. For Westoby, at least, was not a fool, and to an accommodating tool might even be—not just, for what rights has a tool that he can claim?—but not altogether ungenerous.

Meanwhile, Gerald was making up his mind as to how, most diplomatically, he could make use of him. He still believed that this colossal barbarian offered a favourable field for a discreet young man to

exploiter. There are people who owe a great deal more to Nature for what she has done for them in the way of physique, than at all appears on the surface.

To judge by appearances, Westoby and his friend were enjoying themselves. The friend was an ordinary looking person, offering no special points for description; it cannot even be said exactly how it was that he managed to give the impression of being a man, not even so much as on the outskirts of respectable society. In fact, his antecedents, beyond the fact that he was of Dutch extraction, were as lost in mystery as those of Westoby himself, and his experiences had been little less varied. But for the last few years he had kept a canteen in Dutoitspan, and not in one of the most reputable quarters even of that; the profits were presumably satisfactory, since they had enabled him more than once already to proceed to Europe, on business best known to himself.

The two stood leaning with their backs against the bulwarks on the emptier side of the ship, that furthest from the land. They were speaking Cape-Dutch—the native language of the one man, and to the other probably more really natural than his own—and in the interests of the general public this was just as well. Because the remarks and anecdotes which set Westoby's broad shoulders shaking with his deep laughter, were not of the most graceful nature—to say the very least. Their like may be heard around outspan fires on the veld or in the barrack-like dormitory of some up-country farm, where passing waggon-drivers and *voor-loopers* shake down together for the night ; and persons of average respectability, who have been privileged to overhear such conversation, freely admit that it beggars description. Neither does it invite it.

Presently there was a pause. The subject, whatever it may have been, was exhausted for the present ; Westoby began

looking round the deck, taking stock of the passengers.

"You like missionaries, don't you, *Baas?*" said his companion with a grin, following the direction of his eyes. Among all the various kinds of what he called "niggers," among whom his lot had at any time been cast, Westoby was the "Baas," *par excellence.* Other masters off and on, according to the fortunes of service, this man, though he should never be seen among them again, was Baas still and for ever. It was the witness of their instincts to a fact their intellects could never have formulated: that with him mastery was no accident of position, but something inherent in his nature. His associates had picked up the nickname and adopted it. "You like missionaries, I know. There's a very pretty thing in that sort over there."

Westoby looked a moment, and then smiled grimly.

"*She* won't do much harm," he said. "If they were all her sort, they might come in shoals, for me. But they wouldn't come at all. I'd like to see this one's face the first time she rubs up against a nigger; I reckon blackbeetles would be out of it for making her jump! It's not long she'll trouble these parts."

"She'll be bound to; they're going out to be married."

"Who's the other?"

"That one."

Westoby looked, and looked again; and this time he did not speak at all, but his face changed very curiously. There is a certain transfiguration which marks the moment of the birth of a sudden love; this change marked the birth of an antipathy. At the moment when he caught sight of her, Sarah was just turning full towards him. The last faint shadow of land was fading upon the western horizon; away from the old world, away from all the past, she turned to look

eastward and seaward, and, though the tears were still heavy on her lashes, her face as she looked was radiant with the light which it had worn in the parlour in Castlegate, three weeks before.

And it was that light which Westoby met in her eyes, and hated her. Hated her because—plain, prim, narrow-minded woman that she was, in no wise clever, and by nature meek rather than masterful,—he yet felt, with that intuition of character which was among the greatest of the gifts he had abused, that he was in the presence of a spiritual power. Westoby would not have been the clever man he was if he had underrated power of this kind. He would have been even a worse man, perhaps, than he was if he could have sneered at instead of hating it.

His companion looked at him with a certain surprise. He knew, of course, that the very idea of a missionary acted upon Westoby like a red rag on a bull, but he had

scarcely expected to produce so much visible effect.

"What's up, Baas?" he said. "You look riled. Have you had any special row with that lot, lately?"

Westoby faced round furiously.

"I don't know what you would call a row. I've had some d——d cheek from one, if that's what you mean, yes."

"Well, I guess there isn't much odds," said the other with a grin. "What was it about?"

"That's no concern of anyone's."

"That means a girl, then."

"You're precious sharp, aren't you?" sneered Westoby. "Anything you don't know, ain't much worth knowing, is it? As it happens, it just wasn't."

"Not this time?" said the other, quite unmoved. "Well, what was his saintship's name, anyway?"

"I don't know his name, nor his address, and it's the best streak of luck he ever hit

that I don't, too." He paused a moment; he almost seemed to be struggling with his temper, and so used was he to command it from motives of policy that, perhaps, from sheer force of habit, he really was. But this time it was too much for him. The veins in his forehead swelled; his face—literally darkened—became distorted with rage. He brought down one huge clenched fist upon the palm of the other hand, and kept it there, grinding and crushing as though his enemy lay below.

"A d——d sanctimonious young prig of a nigger mongrel to give himself airs with me! A fellow with nigger written all over his canting face to dare to stand up to so much as the lowest white in creation!"

He broke off with an oath. When he spoke again, he had recovered much of his self-command, but his tone was none the pleasanter.

"But you look to yourself, my boy," he said. "You put your trust in your white

face, and your smooth hair, and your nice moral polish, don't you? And you think that a chap with all those points is safe enough, even if he has a dash of nigger blood which shows when he turns up the whites of his pious eyes—and a bit when he doesn't, too— don't you?" He laughed a little. "Look to yourself, my boy," he said again; "take my advice, and look to yourself! For I'll bet my bottom dollar that, one fine day or another, you'll find enough to do."

CHAPTER V.

A TROPICAL night, gemmed with stars; the wide waste of black water broken by gleaming tracts of phosphorescent fire, dashed, under the sides of the vessel, into a spectral splendour of whiteness, out of which a shattered spray of palest green-gold light leapt and fell continually. A red-gold glow from the lamp at the binnacle was comfortably human without being intrusive; another such ray streamed up the companion from the lighted saloon. Somewhere out of the gloom came soft music; a couple of travelling Italian musicians — harp and violin — were rehearsing their stock of tunes. It was not an extensive one, nor was the tone of

their instruments faultless. Yet heard thus faintly, through the constant rush of waters, in the starlit darkness, amid the awful spaces of the sea, there was a harmony in the sounds not their own ; the music put a crown upon the night.

Sarah Bowman sat in a corner of the second-class deck, and watched the glimmering sea-fires and the stars. She was doing nothing, and she was one of those rare women who can sit unoccupied with dignity ; her strength manifested itself in this power of repose.

She sat and thought ; and, though she was not given to dreaming, her thoughts this night, floating with the floating of the waves in the unreal luminous gloom, passed insensibly into dreams. Dream-like seemed the life of the past, infinitely far already, for it was one to which there could be no return. And if the past was dream-like what could be said of the future? Fancy will speak, even where experience gives no hint. It

might be that Sarah was preparing disappointments for herself; a nature like hers is foredoomed to disappointment. On the other hand, she was safeguarded from despair by reason at once of humility and of the curiously maternal character of her affections. Mother-love knows no end to hope.

As she sat there, shadowy forms were passing up and down before her—some singly, more in pairs. They passed with a murmuring sound of talk and laughter, but it was not for some time that any of these wandering voices had power to break her dream. Then, clear to her above all other sounds, came a little silvery giggle, and she was awake at once.

It really was a giggle; an irritating sound, as a rule, redeemed, in this instance, by a certain childlikeness in the manner of it and by its native musicalness, but not redeemed to Sarah's ears by anything at all. She bent a little forward through the darkness; there was anxiety in her face and some

perplexity. Resting with their backs against the bulwarks, stood a young man and a girl. Sarah would have had no need to see their faces to know who they were, but as it happened they were standing just beneath a hanging lantern, and the light fell full upon them.

The girl, of course, was Mattie. A red scarf was thrown loosely over her black hair, ruffled, about the temples, by the breeze; her eyes flashed in the lamp-light; her pearly teeth gleamed between the red lines of her laughter-parted lips. Her companion was a young man of about seven-and-twenty; he was as picturesque in his way as Mattie was in hers—fair-haired, yet with a face so browned with sun and wind, that his really beautiful, pathetic Irish grey eyes looked out of it like a surprise. These eyes, in fact, worked for him much better than he could have done for himself; for Mr. Gerald Blake was not really a very ingenious or resourceful young man, even in the art of

flirtation. But, thanks to his manner and his looks, and to a certain indescribable quality of pathos which he could put into his voice, nobody ever found this out.

They seemed to have chosen their position purposely, for Gerald had hold of Mattie's hand, and was examining the palm. He was tall, and she was singularly small; consequently, he had to bend down considerably in order to make out the lines by the faint light. He, thus bowing over the little hand, she, with her pretty head averted for a moment in mock embarrassment, they made a very picturesque group, no doubt, but the effect of it was, to say the least, confidential.

Sarah had scarcely more than taken it in, when she became aware of someone watching it with her. She became aware of this not by any sight or sound of the watcher, but by a consciousness of eyes somewhere behind her in the darkness, fixed in the same direction as her own. She looked

round instinctively. As she did so, there was a laugh, and someone said :

"Pretty, ain't it, Miss Bowman?"

Sarah rose and turned ; a faint colour came into her face and died away again.

"Oh! come," the voice went on, "you're never going to cut in and spoil it all, are you? Don't, now, miss, for my sake. Because it makes me feel real good, all over, to see young folks enjoying themselves—bless their little hearts! And I know you'd like to make me feel good, now wouldn't you? Eh? You can't settle? Shall I toss up for it, then? Heads, you go for their souls ; tails, you go for mine. The old gentleman's bound to lose on it somewhere, you see, so there can't be any harm."

He took some coin out of his pocket, and began tossing it up and down, catching it in one of his great hands.

"You needn't trouble yourself, Mr. Westoby," said Sarah, in a voice that shook a

little. "You, at least, can have neither part nor lot in such matters, as long as you sit in the seat of the scornful."

They stood facing each other; in the semi-darkness the mere mass of Westoby's huge person seemed to loom ponderously, like something portentous, mythical; while Sarah's pale face gleamed whiter, like a spirit's. Defiance, mutual inevitable antagonism, was in every tone of their voices—in every line of their attitude. The matter ostensibly in dispute was practically unimportant; there was no need of any definite cause of quarrel where mere contact sufficed to produce a discord.

When she had spoken, Westoby laughed again.

"That's no go," he said. "You don't really think that'll go down with me? No; I'm only a poor devil of a white, not a dear, sweet, lost soul of a nigger. That's the English of it, you know: 'none but niggers need apply.'"

Sarah was silent; she could not answer, yet she would not go. To do so would have seemed to her a confession of the weakness of her cause, such as no torture should wring from her—and Westoby's tone and language did cause her real suffering. She remained standing as before, but Westoby seated himself on the bench behind hers, crossed his gigantic arms upon the back, and talked on.

"Now what I look at," he said, "is the confounded waste of it all. 'Tisn't as if niggers *had* souls. You think they have, I know; but you see that's just where you make a mistake. Trust a chap that's lived among 'em, year in, year out, for more years than you've been in the world at all. Now I'll just tell you a rum thing about one of those fellows, a thing that happened to myself."

Here he discovered that something had so far distracted Sarah's thoughts that no pleasure was likely to be got out of even the

most horrifying narrative. Her attention was elsewhere, and looking to see on what it was fixed, he saw that Mattie and her companion were moving away. Gerald seemed to be arguing some point, reproaching, insisting; the girl was defending herself coquettishly. They disappeared into the darker shadow at the end of the deck; at the same moment Westoby rose slowly.

"There's something on your mind, just now, I reckon," he said, "something that wants thinking out. But if I forget to tell you that story some day, just you remind me, will you? Because it's one likely to give no end of wrinkles to anyone that's going to have to do with that lot; put you up to no end of dodges."

He strolled away in the direction taken by the other two. Sarah breathed more freely; but she could not bring herself to sit down again in a spot over which Westoby's insolent spirit still seemed to brood. The very night was desecrated to her; she

gathered up her shawl and went below. A faint sobbing wail drew her to one of the cabins; some baby, left asleep by its mother, had woke up to terrifying solitude. Sarah found her way to it, and while she held it in her arms, hushing and soothing, felt peace and protection wrapping round herself.

Sarah had little knowledge of the world. Her experience of its wickedness, indeed, was absolutely theoretical, derived exclusively from tracts. Now there is no dearth of the most startling kind of sinners in this class of literature. They use habitually the most dreadful language—not specified; they commit, or have committed, the most appalling crimes—also left to the imagination. But in reality they are men of straw, set up to give a cheap victory to the minister or the district-visitor: a victory of which the ease is disguised from the simple-minded reader by the bluster of the adversary.

Therefore Westoby was a great surprise, even a terror, to Sarah. There was a

startling vigour and life-likeness about him, which gave a sickly tinge of unreality to the ruffians of her literary experience. She knew him to be coarse, and suspected him to be brutal. To her, at least, he never opened his lips without in some way outraging her most sacred sensibilities. Of the possible violence of his temper, she thought she knew something, and little guessed how ineffective was the sample which he had purposely allowed her to see—enough, and too much for her, that she had then overheard him making use of expressions which were not represented by blanks, though they might have been with advantage.

Even his physical characteristics were something of a horror to her. His size; the untamed animal vigour which betrayed itself in every movement; his very capacities for food and drink, both of which were in full proportion to the exceptional character of his physique; his voice, harsh by nature and sonorous with the resonance born of con-

stant speaking in the open air; all these things were repulsive to her: they affected her almost as an impropriety. For Sarah was not merely, to all intents and purposes, convent-bred; she had the very spirit of the cloister. She was not consciously an ascetic, any more than she would have been, of set determination, a celibate, because she had been taught that celibacy and asceticism were Popish, and, consequently, immoral. But living outwardly the social life she was, in reality, far less in touch with the world, as generally understood, than many a little convent-bred novice who thinks of it with an awful but delicious curiosity as of something wicked, indeed, and not to be meddled with on any account, but yet exquisitely interesting. Sarah took absolutely no interest in it; she had no need to turn away her eyes from its seductions. She beheld them, and they left her cold.

The baby's mother returned, grateful and apologetic. Sarah gave up her charge, and

returned to the saloon. It was empty ; the open air had greater attractions on a night in the tropics. She sat down, and took up some sewing. In a minute or two there was a sound of light hurrying feet, and Mattie came hastily along the passage, and threw herself into a seat beside Sarah. The girl's eyes were dancing with excitement ; it seemed as though she could scarcely restrain the exuberance of life which thrilled through every fibre of her being. She was always more or less in this condition now.

"Have you been enjoying yourself, dear?" said Sarah, with a conscientious attempt at sympathy ; though, indeed, Mattie had long since got far beyond her comprehension.

"Oh, yes!" said Mattie ; but the details of her enjoyment she kept to herself.

Whatever they were, they seemed to amuse her, for after meditating upon them in silence for a moment, she began to giggle again. She let one little hand fall upon the

table in a would-be accidental manner, palm uppermost, and examined it furtively, which led to dimpling and more giggling. Perhaps she hoped, after all, that Sarah would notice this proceeding, and question her further; if so, she was disappointed. Failing, then, in this move, she began to fail a little in temper also. She took up a piece of the stuff at which Sarah was sewing, and threw it down, impatiently.

"I wonder if there were ever any girls in the world that had such a set of wedding-clothes as we have!" she exclaimed. "It was scarcely worth while to come six thousand miles if our lives are to be as much like the old, old thing as our dresses are."

"I don't think you need be afraid of that."

"Why not? I am afraid of it; that it will be only different by being worse."

"Mattie, dear——"

"And if it is, I shan't be able to bear it,

so there now! They haven't done right by us; no, they haven't. If they had wanted us not to learn better, they should have sent us in the hold with the packages—that's all we are. It's spiteful, that's what I call it, *spiteful*, to let us know how—how nice—things—are just for three weeks, and then tell us we're never to have any more fun for the rest of our lives. Miss Grover's a cat! And it's a burning shame. They all say so."

"*Who* says these things?" asked Sarah, quietly.

"I say them," she said, defiantly, "because I think them."

"If my little Mattie really does think them now, somebody must have been putting them into her head."

"He didn't," said Mattie, hastily. "Well, then, everybody says so. If you weren't always going about with your head full of niggers——"

"Don't use that word, Mattie; it isn't right."

"Mr. Westoby says it. He knows a lot about them."

Sarah was silent.

"Well, if you were like other people you'd have heard for yourself. Everybody pities us; both of us, not only me. People think a deal of you, too. Mr. Blake told me——"

"For shame, Mattie! It isn't like you, it isn't doing right by such a bringing up as you've had, to go borrowing words one minute from a profane scoffer like Mr. Westoby——"

"I only said 'nigger,' that's not swearing, I suppose. As to that, I don't like him any better than you do; a great clumsy teasing bear! Go along with him!"

Nothing in Westoby's manner to Sarah could at all have helped her to understand why Mattie should here also punctuate with a giggle. But then Westoby was a person of varied accomplishments.

"It would be very sad and shocking if

you did really go by what a man like that says, indeed," said Sarah. "And as for the other person—well! I hope he is a well-meaning young man, but I see nothing that could make one think him a sincere Christian, and he is always about with Mr. Westoby."

"He's getting Mr. Westoby to put him up to a thing or two about the country; that's all."

"Oh!"

"You always did dislike poor Mr. Gerald!"

"*Who?*"

"Well, Mr. Blake, then. Oh! dear; you're just too proper to live!"

"If I didn't dislike him before," said Sarah, roused to real indignation, "you've been saying enough to make me now. If anybody's not doing right by you, Mattie, it's him. If that's your fine gentleman, I hope neither you nor I will ever see any more of them! Making a decent young

woman the talk of the ship! one that's as good as married, too! Sitting about in corners with her in the dark for hours; stroking and squeezing her hands over his silly fortune-telling games—and they're wicked, too; walking about with—yes, I did see him, Mattie—with his arm round her waist, whispering—Mattie, what did he want?"

"Nothing," said Mattie. She had borne the recital of Gerald's enormities pretty coolly; if not without a pout, at least with one which was near akin to a smile. But now she turned scarlet to the roots of her hair. She put up her hand, with a conscious gesture, ruffling about the loose locks. Sarah followed the movement mechanically; all at once she saw that they did not cluster quite as usual about the pretty brow. And she got rather white.

"Mattie," she said, a little breathlessly. "Oh! my dear, don't say that. Mr. Blake asked you for a lock of your hair, and he took it."

"No," said Mattie, passionately. "No, he didn't take it. He asked me for it—yes; and I gave it him. Would you like to know some more? He asked me for a kiss, and I gave him that, too. Yes, I did!" She looked defiantly at Sarah for some two seconds; then she covered her face with her hands and began to cry. Sarah knelt down beside her, and put her arms round her waist.

"My dear! Oh, my poor dear! I've been a bad mother to you," she said, remorsefully.

But Mattie shook herself free, jumped up and ran away. She was nearly at the foot of the companion when she suddenly stumbled, and fell with a cry of pain. She tried to rise before Sarah could get to her, but fell back.

"My ankle!" she said, rather faintly. "I slipped on one of those horrid children's marbles. I'm afraid it is a sprain."

Sarah took her up bodily in her arms,

and carried her to the cabin, petting and pitying her as if she were indeed a little child; *her* little child, hurt in body and soul, for whose double hurt her own mother-heart was very sore. For in that last passionate outburst, in those sudden tears, she had guessed, by mere virtue of their common womanhood, at something which till now, had, perhaps, been a secret even to Mattie herself.

It is not unlikely that, for the time being, her trouble was the worse of the two. Mattie, after all, was very much of a child still. Her ankle, though not seriously hurt, pained a good deal, and she bore pain with difficulty; she felt feverish and wretched, and cried a good deal, and she begged Sarah's pardon, and said she knew this was a judgment—and felt rather proud, at bottom, of having so much individual interest in Providence. It made her feel like a girl in a book.

The bodily hurt was not serious. Had

the heart-wound been as slight? Sarah had no means of guessing. To all appearance it was; but the elder girl recognizing, in full humility, that she had mismanaged and misunderstood this affair hitherto, felt no confidence in her own judgment any more. One thing at least was well: Mattie's ankle kept her a prisoner for the few remaining days of the voyage. She and Gerald scarcely met, never alone, till the day when the sight of Table Mountain gave him something far too practical to think about to leave any inclination for flirting.

CHAPTER VI.

Beneath a sky without a cloud the little settlement of Beulah lay glittering in the sunshine of a September morning. All around, like the bulwarks of eternal peace, the mountains stood between it and the outer world. A sort of austere purity was in their very barrenness; denuded of all other vesture, the atmosphere itself clothed them with beauty, laying velvet touches down every shadowy fold—veiling with infinite, well-nigh palpable blueness, the recesses of distant kloofs, turning to a vision-like gleam of opal some far-off ledge of rock smitten with sunlight.

Across the surrounding veld, flower-

enamelled now like the plains of Paradise, groups of coloured folk in their holiday clothes were making their way towards the village: servants, mostly, belonging to the outlying farms, their masters and mistresses meanwhile jogging along at a sling-trot over the sandy tracks, in white or ochre hooded Cape carts, drawn by little, gaunt, ill-groomed horses. And these were all concentrating upon the plain whitewashed building inside its square enclosure bordered with gum-trees, which was the meeting-house of the settlement. In the enclosure a grinning native, of pronounced Hottentot type, was ringing the bell, hung in a sort of little frame with an arched top, whitewashed like the chapel itself. The brisk, tuneless clank, unmusical though it was, united with the gay dresses and the little crowd of carts to give something of a Sunday or festal effect to the whole, though it was not Sunday.

There was one person, however, in Beu-

lah at that moment on whom it made no such effect. The sounds of the bell were borne upon the still air into a room in the minister's house, where a young man was dressing, and they made him more nervous than he was already—which was unnecessary. He hurried on his preparations in an increase of flurry, which made him more helpless every moment. Almost with the first stroke a shuffling scuffle of feet came along the passage; then a voice outside (he had taken the precaution to lock the door):

"Baas, Baas Samuel, August Hendriks, he begin to ring the bell!"

"*I* HEAR!"

Another voice:

"And, Baas, I see the brides; they are coming just now. I see the cart by the church door."

Then yet another voice, female this time, and in Cape Dutch:

"You lie!" (This is the graceful Africander form of contradiction. The

newly-arrived European finds a certain crudity in it; but as no offence is ever taken it is presumable that none is meant.) "You lie! That's Van Renen's cart, from Welgelegen. They're not come out, yet, Baas. But the minister, he say——"

"Oh, dear! get out all of you, this minute," shouted the exasperated victim. "How can a fellow do anything, with you worrying round like that? Do you hear me? *Voetzaak!*"

Two or three delighted sniggers and the scuffling was taken up again, and died in the distance. The comparative release from worry so far quieted the young man that he was able to get on rather better, and soon finished his preparations. Under no circumstances could Samuel Arkwright have been a distinguished looking young man, but it would be quite unjust to say that he generally looked so atrociously common as he did now. His clothes, in whose newness he was obviously ill at ease, were such, for style and cut, as

might be seen adorning a dummy in a tailor's window at Worcester, or the Paarl; and, even so, they fitted the dummy better than they fitted him. Devoid of the slightest taste in dress, he never looked so well as when he had given no attention to the subject at all: so soon as he began to think about it—to select, he was lost. His tie and his pin were equally offensive. Of the latter, it is true, he was only so far guilty as that he saw nothing wrong with it; for it had been a wedding-present from the cricket-club of the settlement, of which he was the very popular captain, so that he was, perhaps, bound to display it on this occasion. His light hair had by nature a curl above the forehead; this he had, with infinite pains, contrived to erect into a sort of cockatoo-crest, resembling a style held fashionable for babies forty or fifty years ago. But the rakish swagger of the effect was indescribable.

He was really, almost painfully, nervous,

and in him nervousness always intensified vulgarity; under stress of it his speech, his carriage, his whole manner would become fairly aggressive. For the rest, when left as nature made him, he was a pleasant looking young man enough, with singularly honest blue eyes, and a face which was the adequate reflex of a kindly and simple, but not silly, soul.

Just as he was adding some finishing touches, in which the horrors of the general effect were concentrated and resumed, a step of a different character to the last set came to the door. Samuel hastily unlocked it, and threw it open, to admit his adoptive father, the head and chief minister of the settlement, the Reverend Joseph Glasse.

"Sam, my dear boy," he began, "aren't you dressed? It is just time to be off. Runciman has been ready this half-hour."

"How is the unhappy man?" asked Samuel, with solemn interest. "Did he make a good breakfast, and attend to the

exhortations of the chaplain? Will he walk with a firm step, do you think? Don't guess I can." Here he turned his toes in and his knees out, in a manner peculiar to the more gifted among comic singers, and staggered a step or two towards the minister. "It's no go," he said, despairingly; "everybody's bound to see what a blue funk this sufferer is in?"

"Sam, you won't play the fool now, will you?" implored the minister. "You must remember it is really a serious thing." The young man's face changed. It was not a face which could ever look really depressed, but as near as it was possible to come to that it did.

"I wish I didn't remember it," he said, ruefully. "Oh! dad, why couldn't they leave a poor duffer alone, that only asked that of them, and never did anybody any harm in all his little games?"

"It was thought best," said the minister, feebly. "And you shouldn't look at it so,

Sam. I'm sure there was never any reflection —— I should say—— You know there couldn't be. And when you see that the application was made on behalf of Jesse Runciman at the same time——"

"All right, dad," said the young man. "Never you mind for this child. I was only chaffing a bit. Though I don't say that I'm very keen on this job; of course, a chap knows he's got to be taken in and done for some time or other, but he likes a chance to *think* he's doing it himself, anyway. And he's not in such a precious hurry, even for that."

"Don't make up your mind to dislike it, there's a dear lad," urged the minister. In very truth he was as little set upon the arrangement as Sam himself, but it was equally against duty and common sense to admit this. "It's not right, you know; and so foolish—now. And you ought to consider the young woman, too."

"Why, you don't think I should be play-

ing it quite so low down as to go taking the change out of *her*, do you?" said Sam, with a touch of honest indignation. His face, ruddy already with polish and nervousness, got redder still for a moment. But the offence passed almost with the words; he was nothing if not good-tempered, also few kinsmen by blood so thoroughly understood and loved each other as this unrelated pair. He threw one arm across the minister's shoulder, with a sort of slap to disguise any possible sentiment. "Never you fear for me, old boy," he said. "I know lots of chaps that have found marriage a thundering good job, and if it depends on me, I'll make it one too. I'll think of how you and the old lady used to pull together, and I'll do my level best to make our turn-out as neat a thing as yours was. Honour bright! You just keep your pecker up, now. We'll all three have high old times together yet, see if we don't. The more the merrier, you know."

"You're a good lad, Sam," said the minister—and added under his breath; "and if she doesn't see it, she'll——" then hastily broke off the thread of his soliloquy with some shame. "Now, my boy, we really must be off. We have to go round by the school to pick up Runciman."

Sam stuck on a hat which fully equalled the rest of his costume. He cast one last hasty look at the glass. "Oh! lor'," he sighed.

If the minister did hear this sigh, he was too wise to take any notice of it. They went out together; the cart was waiting in front of the oak-tree shaded stoep. Sam got in. The servants had gone on to the chapel, so the minister stayed to lock the door. He lingered a moment over the simple action, with a touch, perhaps, of the feeling of Old Timothy, in the ballad:

"The key I must take, since my Ellen is dead."

It was not quite so bad as that, cer-

tainly; and he had, in fact, taken the key often enough before. Yet there was, after all, a sort of finality about the act this time, a sense of coming change which, to Joseph Glasse, at least, was a sense of coming loss; for he had got to that age at which there are few things of which men do not say, "The old is better." When that door should be unlocked again, the accustomed, happy life, *en garçon*, would be over for those two for ever. And it had suited the old man very well. In the ten years of his widowerhood, he had slipped back into much of that ease in which a man is said to live when he is single. Sam, too, was very dear to him, and his love, unknown to himself, had something in it of the jealousy natural to old age. But now the decree had gone forth that Sam must "range himself," and the minister felt that many little harmless ways of his own, grown pleasant by long custom, might probably have to "range themselves" also. And now, too, one was to come whom, in

merest duty, Sam would be bound to try, at least, to put first in his affections. The minister was a good man, and so far from dissimulating this duty, he had even urged it upon the bridegroom, with many secret vows of self-effacement. But it was not in human nature that he should feel much delight at the prospect. To say he would gain a daughter rather than lose a son might be consolatory in the abstract, but, practically, he did not want a daughter.

In a very few minutes they stopped before the school-house, low and white, and thatched like the rest, with large sash windows, each small square pane heavily framed in white. Like all the other houses of any pretension, it was half-hidden by oak trees, now in the first freshness of spring leaf. The stoppage was not for long. On the brick stoep, where tins of portulaccas placed along the edge made splashes and trails of blazing colour— magenta, crimson, blood-red — the schoolmaster was waiting for them.

From his childhood the first thing that strangers used to notice about Jesse Runciman was the beauty of his eyes, and, at the next look, some, at least, would fall to wondering whether they really were beautiful, after all. In a certain sense, they were: large, and dark, and very soft, with a sort of blueish iridescent tint about the whites that gave a certain character to the whole. They were intelligent, too; they were good; and yet they were not comfortable; they were haunted at once with a hint of incompleteness and of possibilities. Such eyes in kind, though not in degree, as might have met the wanderer among the glades round Circe's palace; pathetic inexpressibly with some fading memory of the human; yet dreadful, too, even in the gentlest, with the look of the brute nature that had overpowered it. The curious thing about them, in this instance, was that this peculiarity, noticeable chiefly when the face was in repose, seemed to contradict the very face itself. That expressed

intelligence, energy, and will, and, dominating these, a certain passionate spirituality. Yet even here there was a nameless something that was to be felt rather than to be seen—something not ascribable to any one feature, yet subtly affecting the whole; something of a type neither English nor Dutch—in point of fact, not European at all.

"That's right, Runciman," cried the minister. "Ready, of course! What did I tell you, Sam? That lazy fellow nearly made us all late, Runciman, and there would have been a pretty state of things — the brides waiting for the bridegrooms, eh?"

The young man had already got in and seated himself behind, beside Sam, who greeted him with the tender of a limp hand and a hollow groan. Perhaps it was intended for sympathy; but the other took no notice, and Sam subsided.

It seemed to him that the cart had scarcely got in motion before it stopped again, this time at the gate of the enclosure;

and now the ordeal by eye was no longer to be avoided. The minister fussily, Runciman as in a dream, and Sam with a frightful swagger, passed up the path and entered the chapel. That was crowded already ; but the coloured people, who formed the bulk of the congregation, were too well drilled to venture on much demonstration in those precincts, and the general decorum was most edifying. The two or three families of outsiders did, indeed, stare, and nod, and whisper as the young men passed ; but the kindly shelter of one of the few high pews reserved in a sort of transept for the families of the elders and deacons soon received them, and poor Sam was in comparative comfort. The native, like the schoolboy, is better without such accommodation, and the main body of the building had been judiciously fitted with forms.

The head deacon's wife struck up a lively Moody and Sankey tune on the harmonium, by way of a wedding-march.

It was to this lady, fundamentally, that the whole credit of the present situation was due ; and she thought it very creditable, and put a certain pious swing of triumph into the lilting vulgar air, with its refrain painfully suggestive of a nigger melody. It happened to be the tune of a temperance hymn, and every soul in the chapel knew the words belonging to it, but not one, either, was in the least troubled by this slight want of appropriateness. But they had not long to listen to it, for a moment later the two brides came in, and there was little attention to spare for music.

Considering the experiences through which they had been hurried since their arrival in Cape Town three days before, it was little wonder that the girls looked chiefly dazed. If there was any difference noticeable in their expression it was that Mattie seemed scared, and Sarah distressed. It should be reckoned high praise that they did not lose their heads entirely. Miss

Grover might well have been proud, could she have seen them, of the sort of mechanical correctness with which they went through their parts; it was a triumph of sheer discipline over nerves.

The service began. By degrees Mattie lost much of her look of terrified bewilderment. After all, to be married, to be that culminating point of interest to the female fancy—a bride—this was something. Perhaps nothing in the world is ever quite so perfect as it might by some possibility be, and circumstances were conceivable that might have added satisfaction even to this situation. But on the whole Mattie was rather elate.

When, on the previous afternoon, she had learned from the head deacon's wife, in the course of a rapid biography, that Jesse Runciman had coloured blood in his veins —(his grandmother, the daughter of a Horanna chief, had been brought up on an up-country Mission-station; his great-grand-

father had remained a typical old savage to the day of his death)—she certainly had not been pleased. Yet the announcement had affected her much less than might have been expected. She was then still in a state of mere confusion. That constitutional horror of the coloured races which Westoby had predicted in her had, indeed, asserted itself from the first moment she landed; but she had not yet had time to analyze the sensations produced in her—little capable, indeed, of such analysis under any circumstances. The fact therefore represented little to her beyond a rather disagreeable abstract idea. Add to this that Mattie was rather chameleon-like in the matter of her opinions: they took their colour very much from that in which they were viewed by the person who presented them to her. If it had been put before her as Westoby, for example, might have put it, it is probable that even at the eleventh hour she would have found courage to refuse a

union which she could easily have been led to think of as nothing less than revolting. But so far from this she soon found that her informant considered it a matter of no practical importance at all, absolutely powerless to affect Runciman's claims to social or racial equality with anyone. She was further told that among Colonials (Mrs. Davis was English), "bless you, my dear, half of 'em have it; nobody thinks anything of a little thing like that—can't afford to. There's many got it a deal nearer and stronger than him, but so long as it don't *show* too much, you understand, who'd trouble?"

No one certainly could deny that Jesse fulfilled this obligation. Mattie, least of all, utterly ignorant of national types, could have been expected to trace anything of his lineage in his face, nor in fact did she do so. She thought him, on the whole, decidedly good-looking; not so good-looking, perhaps, as—— But she filled up the blank only with

a sigh; she was going to be a good girl henceforward; all that was done with, and never to be thought of any more.

But before Mattie had found encouragement, Sarah had found peace. Once the service had begun, the familiar language of prayer and exhortation produced a quieting effect. In all this strange, unhomelike land, this was the first spot where she had felt at home; the language spoken here, at least, was that, more than any other, familiar to her heart. Even the peculiar rising and sinking inflection of the voice helped to comfort her; she closed her eyes and tried to think she was back in the little brick chapel at Marston; that beside her was the row of round, fresh, solemn faces of the smaller girls who had been her special charge; that the voice was that of the old minister; that he was saying—— Here she brought herself back, with shame, for she felt that she had not indeed heard anything of what was being said.

When she did listen it is idle to deny that she was disappointed. The general opinion of the congregation was that the minister's closing prayer was singularly wanting in unction—and very likely it was. As he doled out one perfunctory phrase after another, Sarah tried to draw, with these empty vessels, at least from her own spiritual wells. She tried, and failed; for, indeed, she had come to a fountain sealed as yet. Of marriage in a spiritual light, in any light save as a necessary condition to her work, she had never thought; and till it should be more stimulatingly put before her than was being done now, she never would so think, for it met no want in her nature. For support? she could stand alone; for the satisfying of any void in her heart? there was no such void, for there she bore, mother-like, every young and weak and suffering soul within her cognizance.

The poor old minister, having done his duty with regard to time at least, if he could

not wring from his heart a consent to do it with enthusiasm, wound up his prayer; there was a movement among the congregation, one or two stood up. And then, suddenly, they were stopped.

From the first, Jesse Runciman had been in a strange state of abstraction. He had gone through everything, had stood, spoken, moved, with something of the unconscious accuracy of one magnetized. And now, when his voice came unexpectedly upon the pause, it made a silence of all other sounds throughout the chapel.

Rising and falling, in the strange conventional modulations of the voice of extempore prayer among the sects, this voice was yet suggestive of nothing less than of conventions. The well-kept, substantial building, the common-place congregation, all the comfortable little vulgarities of modern civilization, were struck out of keeping by it. It cut right through to nature; was it, perhaps, too near? Who

can tell? For the strange contradiction between face and eyes was here too. The voice was the voice of passions more primitive, more emphatic, than might always submit with patience to such restraints as suffice for ordinary men; the words were not merely words of prayer, but almost of mysticism. Judged by these, the man might have been pure spirit.

He prayed that the union here begun on earth might be but the means of a closer union with heaven, a spiritual ladder upon which angels might ascend and descend more easily. He prayed that each, reverencing in the other not only the handiwork, but the predestinating Providence of the Creator, Who, by strange paths and through the mighty waters, had brought together, by no carnal tie, those who came but to be the instruments of His glory, might so live as became beings privileged to be the subjects of so special and manifest an interposition. That living, after

the flesh, the married life, their life, after the spirit, might be already as that of the angels which are in heaven; that each in this path helping on the other, they might go on together from glory to glory, till, wedded souls on earth, they might still find their rightful place among the virgin souls, who, above the earth, follow for ever the Beloved Who feedeth among the lilies.

Spiritual enough! And one nature which was really little else, which could never know or guess at such awful possibilities of conflict as lay in the other, recognized its kinship. To Sarah, as he prayed, a whole new world of duties, privileges, aspirations, was opened. For the first time she thoroughly realized that, foremost among all her other works and duties would be the work and duty of a wife. Yet under the spell of that exalted ideal, the revelation brought her no disappointment, no sense even of inferiority in dignity of mission; her imagination was left free to soar towards heights scarcely

less spiritually exalted than those of her missionary aspirations.

As the schoolmaster concluded his prayer, Sarah turned slightly and looked towards her husband. It was a strange look; there was as little in it of shyness as there was of love, there was not even any natural curiosity as to this all but unknown personality—seen but once before for some brief half-hour—which was henceforth united to her own. But utter loyalty was in that look, reverence was in it; some such reverence as Milton's Eve displays for Adam, but Eve has a suspicion of sentimentality about her devotion, and of sentiment in Sarah there was absolutely no trace at all. Allowing for difference of sex, it was much more the look which a follower of Ignatius Loyola might cast upon the General of his order.

And at the moment she looked, poor Sam was fumbling on the floor for his glove which he had dropped, and muttering slangy ejaculations under his breath.

CHAPTER VII.

It was a December afternoon, two or three weeks before Christmas. Last year, at this time, a little girl, one among a dull-uniformed regiment, dressed in an ill-cut brown stuff frock, her pretty little hands disfigured with chilblains, had been sitting sewing in a cold bare room in which the fire at one end had been little more than a mockery; there had been greyness and cold without, white calico and cold within; there had been rule of the strictest, austerities, and repression.

To-day the same girl was sitting out of doors on the brick bench at one end of the stoep of the school-house. All around her was, if no luxury of art, at least a luxury

of nature : a glowing prodigality of sunshine, a wealth of foliage, a blaze of colour—stately gold of the sunflowers, burning scarlet of poinsettia and hibiscus ; while, cooler and more delicate, the soft green of the garden hedge was thickly starred with the blue-grey clusters of the plumbago. As for personal appearance she looked prettier than ever in her white gown and shady hat ; both had formed part of her wedding outfit, but both had been remodelled into a suggestion of something very different to the spirit which had guided the original design.

Yet Mattie Williams had looked happy and good ; Mattie Runciman could not be honestly said to look either. She sat with her chin resting on her hand ; her eyes were fixed on a pink paper covered periodical which lay open on her knee. There was a vague discontent in her face ; the look of a spoiled child whom a cruel kindness, by condemning it to satiety, has debarred

from satisfaction. She turned over the pages of the paper now and then, but it was listlessly. In fact, she had been reading for two hours that afternoon already, and even her mental palate, little educated though it was, began to feel cloyed with the sickly sweetness of the sentiment, her imagination to feel jaded with following the galvanized bounds of an artificial passion. Nevertheless, a girl of her stamp has time to sustain a good deal of damage from literature of this class before she gives in; and, though there was not a page in the journal which the most prudish could have stigmatized as immoral, there is no doubt that Mattie was none the better for her afternoon's reading, nor for the many afternoons and—too often—mornings that had preceded it.

She was secretly glad to be interrupted by the sound of the click of the garden gate; when she saw Sarah coming up the path she did not indeed run to meet her,

but she did throw down the paper and brighten up for a moment till she was more like the Mattie of six months before—Sarah's child-sister, who in all her little waywardnesses, her half humorous rebellions, had never lost the fundamental desire to do right, to be, in her degree, more like her friend.

Sarah came on with a quiet haste which conveyed no idea of hurry. She wore a grey gown; physically, it did not become her, but with her that was a matter which no one ever observed. In all other respects it was in thorough harmony with her appearance. For always, now, Sarah Arkwright seemed to be walking in shadow—a holy shadow, indeed, for it was that of a great patience, but a shadow for all that.

Her face brightened scarcely less than her friend's as she stooped to kiss her.

"Isn't it time for school to be out?" she said. "Here is a poor woman in great trouble. Her husband is lying very sick

in an old hut beyond Tygerfontein ; I fear he is at the point to die, and now his conscience writes bitter things against him, and he is afraid. So Mr. Glasse sent me to ask Mr. Runciman to go up with the woman and see what can be done for this poor soul."

"Why doesn't he go himself?" asked Mattie. The question was natural, if not remarkable for tact ; but there was something too much in the tone of a disposition to find fault with everything, for no better reason than that it was not something else.

Sarah coloured slightly ; she paused ; when she did speak it was so very gently as to be noticeable even in her who was always gentle.

"He was there this morning ; if he could have done any more good, I'm sure you know that he would have gone now, and again and again. But for such work as this, it has not pleased the Lord to prepare him. Let every man abide in his

own calling wherein he is called. There are those who are bidden to go up to the battle, and those who are bidden to tarry by the stuff; we are told in the Word that one portion shall be to both alike."

Yet how had all her yearnings, all her enthusiasm for years, been for the battle and its heroes!

"Well, I daresay Jesse will go," said Mattie, carelessly; "you can go in and see. But I think if people are always expecting him to do minister's work, he ought to get minister's pay too. Oh! Sarah, dear, my dear old grannie, don't *you* look at me like that! I didn't mean it—I didn't mean anything. Oh! you would be sorry for me, if you knew how cross and wicked I always feel now—and I can't think why! Sarah, darling, scold me and forgive me. I would *like* to be scolded."

"I never used to do much of that, my Mattie, did I?" said Sarah.

Mattie made no answer; she laid her

head against her friend's arm, and held her hand fondlingly between her own; and then, slowly, her lip began to quiver in a childish, piteous way, and a mist to soften the brightness of her quick black eyes.

"No; don't scold me, Sarah—comfort me," she said.

"What do *you* want comforting about, dearie?" said Sarah. She did not know that she had made an emphasis.

"I—don't know," said Mattie. "Never mind; don't talk; only sit and hold me so. That is so quiet, and comfortable, and good."

They sat side by side in silence after that, till from inside the house a chorus of plaintive, shrill, yet not wholly unmusical voices broke out in a hymn.

"There," said Mattie, "that's the end. Jesse will be out directly."

"I will go in, I think," said Sarah. "I want to see Killian Smidt before he goes home. Sam gave me a message for him about the younger boys' cricket match."

She went in. Mattie was left alone. The woman whom Sarah had brought with her had remained standing at the gate. Seeing her protectress enter the house she came in and advanced as far as the stoep. There she stopped uncertainly. "Good-day, meesis," she said, with a painfully abject grin.

She was a not favoured specimen of an unattractive race — the coloured vagrant: half loafer, half odd-jobber; always on trek from one squatting place to another. The rags which she wore, or rather had cast upon her, had had all colour drenched and scorched and weather-tormented out of them long ago. They had turned one dull sickly uniform brown; only here and there, on the skirt, square patches of various-patterned print stood out startling in their comparative freshness. Over her head she wore, kerchief fashion, a cloth, once white, now grey with dirt; from a sort of bundle at her back protruded something round, and black, and

woolly : the head of a baby. The creature could not have been above four months old ; in such a position, its weakly neck could not properly support the weight of the head, which lolled helplessly from side to side over the edge of the rags. Even at this age its little hands were clutching each a piece of dried snock, with sucking which its flat monkey-face was shiny and sticky.

As for the odours which stole upon the air——! There was, first, that of the dried snock aforesaid, of which the smallest piece seems equal to sampling effectively a whole bloater factory. Added to this was that indescribable one perhaps peculiar to the great unwashed of South Africa, and which appears to be due, more or less, to the strange pungent scent of the smoke from the roots and scrub they use for firing. And as if these were not enough, they were, alas! unmistakably reinforced by the fumes of the worst description of Cape brandy.

It cannot be denied that she was repul-

sive to every sense of body and mind—this maudlin, degraded, servile creature, as near an approach to the lowest type of savage as a civilized community will anyhow tolerate. But the way in which Mattie shrank from her betrayed a repugnance beyond anything that the same amount of misery and degradation could have excited in her at home. It was a horror differing not merely in degree but in kind. She had been sitting with her eyes closed after Sarah had left her, when she opened them at the sound of the woman's voice, there came into them not disgust only, but fear. The tramp's shadow fell across the stoep upon her feet, and on the skirts of her gown. As though, without even looking, she had felt this, she drew back out of it into the sunshine with a movement as instinctive as that with which she might have recoiled from a snake. There was in the movement something of the almost physical horror that might be excited by some sudden awful metamorphosis of a brute creation

into human form. To Mattie, in very truth, even the civilized native was doubtfully of her own species; the uncivilized one she simply did not feel to be human at all. There is no arguing with a feeling of this kind; but there may be a struggle against it, and, so far, Mattie had been at least trying, however, feebly, to fight. But she was getting morally blacker week by week, almost day by day.

She was sitting thus helplessly looking at the woman, when Jesse Runciman came quickly out of the house. At the door he turned and called back to someone inside.

"You will come, too," he said, "there may be work for you. I will wait till you have arranged your business."

Then he came towards the others.

"Is this the woman Mrs. Arkwright tells me about?" he asked.

"Yes; but I don't know what she wants up here, and I wish you'd send her away.

I'm quite sure she's drunk," said Mattie, piteously.

Runciman cast one glance upon the miserable creature below. It was enough to convince him that Mattie was not far wrong.

"You hear that?" he said, sternly, in Dutch. "And you know it is true."

"*Nij, Baas,*" whined the woman. She put one corner of her rags into her eyes and began to whimper in a feeble, drivelling way.

"Lies won't make it any better," he said, sharply. "Well, go back, and say I am coming. Go."

She made a kind of cringing curtsey, mumbling gratitude, turned, and went.

He watched her down the path and out at the gate.

"She will scarcely get there," he muttered, with angry contempt.

He turned away, and came up to Mattie.

"Did she vex you, my dear?" he said.

The voice could scarcely have been recognized for that of the same man.

"You know I'm afraid of tipsy people," said Mattie. "Of course, I didn't like it; but it doesn't signify."

He sat down beside her, and took her hand and stroked it, and then lifted it to his lips and kissed the little fingers one by one with a strange passion, and pressed it again, and seemed as though he could not look at her or fondle her enough. And his soft eyes certainly did not gain in spirituality the while.

"You heard I have to go out now?" he said, presently. "And Johnnie Steyn has been saying his grandmother is very low to-day. Wouldn't you, maybe, look in and have a chat with her? It would please her ever so much. You'll do it, won't you?"

Mattie leaned back wearily in her corner, and pressed her hand to her brow.

"It is such a hot walk," she sighed, "and so stuffy when you get there! And those big cups of sweet coffee she makes one have always made me ill, and I don't

know what to say to her, nor I don't understand half she says to me; and I have the headache so badly already."

"Don't trouble then, my dear," he said at once; "you mustn't think of it."

Mattie did not look grateful, but she did not retract her refusal.

"Is the pain very bad?" he asked. He drew her head down upon his breast, and held her close, kissing her on the temples again and again, smoothing back the pretty stray locks, and murmuring pity and endearment as he bent over her. They sat in a position scarcely different from that in which she had been sitting with Sarah just before; yet there was no appearance that Mattie found any of those qualities in his embrace which she had commended in Sarah's. Nevertheless, she remained passive; she did not speak—only sighed.

"What will you do for your head, dear?" said Jesse. "Will you go in and lie down, or will you be better sitting out

here in the air? Have you anything to amuse yourself with? What is this?"

He picked up the illustrated journal she had been reading. Mattie seemed to think some defence was necessary.

"Anna Marais lent it me to try some cooking recipes out of it," she said, rather quickly.

Jesse was fluttering over the pages rather contemptuously. His conscience would not have allowed him to spend ten minutes over it himself. Of any other reader in the world he would have asked, indignantly, how a being with an immortal soul and an account to give could waste time and thought over such trash; but having, in the first days of his marriage, weighed Mattie's soul in his own balances and found it wanting, as judged by that standard, it may be seriously questioned whether he any longer practically believed that she had a soul at all. Certainly, for a long time past, he had not been going the way to increase

his belief in that part of her. Now he only said,

"And does it amuse you, sweet?"

Even Mattie seemed a little surprised.

"I don't know; well, then—no!" she exclaimed, impatiently.

He said no more. For a minute or two longer they sat as before, he caressing, she submitting, and then Sarah came out. Jesse stood up on the instant.

"I'm sorry to have kept you waiting," said Sarah. "It took me longer than I thought to settle things with Killian. We did not seem able to understand each other very well. I'm afraid Sam chose a stupid messenger," she added, and smiled faintly. "I've tried to learn the meaning of it all, but I seem to have made a poor business of it."

"I sent the woman on before, to say I was coming," said Jesse. His eyes, his voice were both changed again; braced, as it were, and standing at attention. "I thought

that we should not need her to show us the way, as you have been there already, and the man might be looking for her." He turned to Mattie. "I shall try to be back by tea-time," he said. "But if I should be late, don't wait for me, and don't sit up ; I can't say whether I may not have to stay all night."

He bent and kissed her—reasonably, this time—and went away. He put her aside, as he might have put aside any other indulgence ; he left her, as a man might leave his easy-chair or his meal at the call of duty, without one instant's shadow of hesitation, but as something which simply had no connection with any but the animal life. He seemed to have effected a complete divorce between the two sides of his nature ; thus far had three months of matrimony brought him from the aspirations of his wedding-day.

Yet he had not himself begun to suspect, nor was there anyone in Beulah with sufficient

discernment to tell him, that he was morally in a less satisfactory condition than he had been six months before. Perhaps, even had any possessed the discernment they would scarcely have felt the right to speak. It was Jesse Runciman's real and great misfortune that, hitherto, he had never met his spiritual superior. This, indeed, he had now found in Sarah. But she had too much humility, and he, as yet, too little, for either to recognize the position in which each should by rights have stood towards the other. At present, he lorded it over her, beneath whose footstool he might yet come to be glad to be allowed to sit.

As soon as Jesse was out of sight, Mattie suddenly snatched up her magazine from the bench beside her, and flung it right across the stoep. Then she stood a moment, and for all the sunshine was so hot she shivered. She turned slowly and went into the house.

CHAPTER VIII.

RUNCIMAN and Sarah set out at a quick pace, and had soon passed through the village. They spoke little, and what they did say was but trivial. Now and then a passing labourer made a sort of shambling swerve of head and shoulders towards the schoolmaster, with a "Good afternoon, *Baas*." They never touch their hats, but the peculiar movement they affect is so like a cringe, that the omission can scarcely be ascribed to any haughty spirit of independence. Now and then a child from among the groups still straggling home from school, would silently contrive to attract Sarah's attention by a broad, shy grin; then

she would smile and call it gently by its name, and it would trot on quite satisfied.

They came to the waggon-shops, where Sam Arkwright, who superintended that department of the industries of the settlement, hot, cheerful, and practical, was working like a Briton himself, and by dint of example and a good-tempered, but very free use of the richest vernacular, was contriving also to get more real work out of his men than the head of any other department could quite compass. Sarah turned her head towards the open doors, and though she saw nothing, and heard but the beat of the hammers and the strident rush of planes and saws, she smiled a little, tenderly, and the patient shadow lightened somewhat from her eyes.

"I'm glad there are so many happy people in the world," she said.

Perhaps her gentle voice may have had the faintest tinge of pathos, a voice as of one who was learning to look on at happi-

ness from the outside; but he answered as though he had rebuked a complaint.

"A contented mind is a continual feast," he said, briefly. "That is a secret of happiness within the reach of us all, and within our duties, too."

"You are right," she said. "Thank you."

They went on a few paces, and then he stopped and said:

"It will be a long walk and a lonely one; had you not better go into the shops and ask your husband to come for you, if you have not been able to get back before dark?"

For him this was almost consideration and common-sense, but it was not this that made Sarah look surprised.

"There's no need," she said. "I'll be back long before then."

"How can you tell that?" he asked, brusquely. "You can't know beforehand what work there may be for you to do."

"I must be back by tea-time, anyway," she said. "Mr. Glasse always likes me to be in by that, and it's only right by my husband that I should be. I'll go with you now, because I have something to take that was promised this morning, but I don't mean to stay."

He frowned.

"The curse was upon Meroz," he said, sternly, "for no other reason than this—that it came not to the help of the Lord against the mighty. And do you remember who He has said are not worthy of Him? You have had spiritual gifts entrusted to you above the general run; don't forget, Sarah Arkwright, that of you will be asked the more."

She looked troubled, but she answered firmly:

"There can't be anything wanted that you aren't better fitted and clearer called to do than I. I don't know why my conscience doesn't speak with yours in this

matter; but it is my own I shall have to answer for, after all."

Perhaps this struck him as reasonable, for he said no more. He always honestly tried to be just, though a mind less judicial by nature probably never existed. His plain duty towards his scholars had imposed this upon him, and, so far, his present vocation was good for him—as anything was that obliged him to balance and moderation.

They walked on again in silence. Presently they passed the head-deacon's house. On the stoep Mrs. Davis was sitting; she had a large basket of mending by her side, and a half-darned sock on her hand. But that hand lay helplessly in her lap, and her head drooped low upon her breast—for the afternoon was hot, and Mrs. Davis was of comfortable proportions, and so it came to pass that for the last quarter of an hour she had been fast asleep in her Madeira chair.

This woman had been the prime mover

in the committing of a great wickedness, so far as one couple at least was concerned : a sin no less against the husband than against the wife. But though she possessed a conscience of not less than average sensibility this thing had never troubled it at all ; nor to her dying day would it so trouble her or any of the others concerned in the affair. They had all acted for the best, and by prescription. There is so much harm done in the world for which really no one can be held morally responsible ; yet the evil works as cruelly as though the calculations of the most refined malice had gone to its devising.

When they had got through the village, Sarah became guide. Their way led first by sandy tracks across the veld ; then, through a ricketty gate in a stone wall, they entered the grassy enclosure of a farm—the last in the valley.

Turning down a rough path between vineyards, whose grapes were already tinged with purple, they went down to a grove of

mingled oak and pine, and crossed by a plank bridge the stream, whose springs, a little further up among the mountains, gave its name to the farm—Tygerfontein ; springs round which, within the memory of the farmer himself, the fiery eyes and supple shadowy forms of the mountain leopards had been seen moving in the dusk. Once beyond this, even the tracks disappeared : they made their way as best they could among the clumps of dry bristly scrub, always skirting the base of the hills, towards a hollow a mile or so beyond the farm, where a couple of oak-trees made a landmark for them.

For a long time neither had said a word. What manner of quiet communings Sarah might have been holding with her soul there was nothing in her face to show ; but it was pretty evident that Jesse Runciman was getting worked up. It is but the commonest justice to state the fact in this way : he was not in the least working himself up ; to attain any conceivable height of excitement he had

never required anything further than just to let himself go.

With Jesse, temperance in any form was most markedly the work of grace ; his nature, in all its branches, and whether for good or evil, tended always and in everything to excess. Spiritually, whenever he was not *tête montée* he was plunged in some slough of despond, so genuine and so full of horrors, that he used really to suffer in bodily health on these occasions. But, as a general rule, he was in the former condition ; a great deal more so than was at all safe. This had been the case even in the old days, at a time when he used to be far more on his guard than ever he was now ; when a fight—often absolutely physical—with every instinct of his lower nature had, to a certain extent, kept him in subjection all round. But in these last months his exaltation had been more continuous, more noticeable than ever. At the weekly prayer-meetings, in particular, his eloquence—and such as it was, it had always

been that of the heart, it was no artificial production of the intellect—often fairly quickened to a passing enthusiasm, a not very impressible assembly; so greatly had it gained in warmth, that any possible loss in elevation was inappreciable. He himself certainly was conscious of none; he was quite satisfied with the effect, and the cause he did not suspect; it certainly did not occur to him that this phenomenon was but one sign, among others, that he was breaking bounds in every direction.

Quite suddenly, now, he broke silence.

"Do you know what it is," he said, "to wrestle for a soul?"

He did not wait her answer, but went on.

"I have wrestled for one, once. It was all one night; every power of hell was loose that night, I think, and all contending for the possession. And they had a leader; I saw him, I heard him. Yes! if ever the devil spoke in the likeness of a man I heard him do it then. All night long; we were three,

in a native hut; it was dark, dark—and a great red glow of fire, we could see each other by it—yet it gave no light, not one ray at all—dead black darkness all round it, not touched at all. It was like hell."

He shuddered and stopped.

"But it was not that," said Sarah. And now unconsciously her voice took the soothing tone she might have used to a child. She could not help it; his horror was so evident, so simple. "Not that; because for the poor soul you were speaking of there was still place for repentance. You can tell me, can't you, that he found peace; that joy came in the morning?"

"Yes," he said. But he spoke absently, and he did not go on. The sudden workings of a great dread were visible in every feature, in the nervous movements of his hands. All the agonies which he was preparing to encounter in another, he was going through at that moment in his own person.

"Tell me about that poor man," said Sarah, gently, when he still did not speak.

He collected himself with an effort, passing his hand across his brow; it was cold and damp.

"It was about the drink," he said. "The man—a native he was—had been a mad drunkard; it was a possession. He had been reclaimed a few months before, but it was awful suffering often, even still. Awful! I never thought, I never could have believed . . ." His tone, which had been quieter, began to swell to its wild note again. "And then—*he* came in; I don't know who he was, I never saw or heard of him before or since. He came in—out of the night—from walking to and fro upon the earth, I suppose. He threw himself down before the fire, and then he took out a great flask of that accursed stuff and offered it to us. And so it began."

"He couldn't have known!"

"He knew, because I told him. For

the matter of that it seems the two had met before. And then I heard him swear to himself in English, that he would soon put a stop to that. He said he had no notion of blue-ribbon niggers."

"An Englishman?"

"I suppose so. But to the man he spoke in Sesutu; he spoke it like a native, and as for what he said—I told you the tempter himself must have taught him that. Oh! God, that night! We could not go; he had set himself in front of the opening of the hut, and he was a giant among men—I could not have made him stir a limb—the native was a powerful man, but his will was not whole in this matter, how could one expect it? So he sat there, drinking slowly, on and off, in our sight. That poor wretch! I put my arms round him, and I hid his face against me as I knelt; he was such a strong man, that, just with his shuddering, he nearly bore me down. Now and then he cried out; it was as if the evil spirit tare him."

He paused; he was deadly white, and gasping a little. Sarah's eyes were full of tears, her face of a breathless awe.

"I don't know how long it lasted; I don't rightly know what we said or did—any of us. I suppose I prayed—I must have spoken loud, and for a long time, for next day my voice was almost gone, but I don't remember a word of my own. By-and-bye the fumes began to creep about the hut; stronger and stronger: I could do nothing to keep that from him. And then his will began to go. He twisted round his head; I saw his face—as it were, a wild beast possessed of a devil. And I felt him writhing himself away from me. All at once he gave a great yell and broke loose. The tempter was holding—it—out at arm's length. Then, I think strength from the Lord came upon me; I wrenched it from him—I could not have unclasped one of his fingers at any other time. There was a cooking-pot upon the hearth. I dashed it

against that; the fire sprang up in a blue flare, and I saw the Englishman's face plainly. I thought, then, in another second, to have grasped my crown."

"The Lord has need of you here still, brother," sobbed Sarah.

"Perhaps; I don't know. Sometimes I think that maybe it was the devil himself who then stayed the hand of his servant; that I never might get it, now, after all."

He spoke wearily; his voice was suddenly faint and weak. His passages from excitement to despondency were generally accomplished thus abruptly.

"Well," he went on, with a sigh, "it was over, at any rate. He dropped his arm all in a moment, and then, he did not even swear, he went out . . . and it was night . . . After that . . . I don't remember . . . everything went from me all at once . . . and when I came to myself . . . the day had broken . . . and the shadows fled away."

He had stopped in his walk, and stood leaning against one of the great brown boulders that were scattered sparsely about the mountain slopes. He might almost have been on the verge of some such sudden collapse as he had just indicated. It seemed a problem where he would find the nervous force necessary for a work which, even while still in imagination, had proved a strain on his resources. But to such demands as this he had, in fact, never yet proved unequal ; it was the plain paths, the smooth places of life—not its dark mountains, its valleys of the shadow—that were too difficult walking for him.

They were now, indeed, but a stone's throw from the hovel—it was nothing more ; the shrill insistence of a baby's cry breaking upon the hot silence of the summer afternoon came to rouse him, and as they walked on again the woman he had dismissed at the school gate came towards them ; his prediction had not been verified.

"It is good that you come, Baas," she said. "He is very sick; I think he die just now. And he cry out all the time; I hear him from out there."

"Well! why are not you in with him?" asked Jesse, sharply. The schoolmaster instinct, awakened by her delinquencies, brought him to himself, perhaps, more quickly than anything else could have done.

"I can't go in there," she whined, but doggedly. "I'm frightened for the spooks. He say they stand by the door."

Jesse strode on past her, and went into the hut. Sarah watched him disappear; then she turned to the woman with a few kind words. Her voice was still a little tremulous, but her face was illumined with a radiance which it had not known for many a long day. She did not linger after she had unpacked her basket, but turned and went away across the sunny solitude, her heart full of voiceless thanksgivings.

When, from the dazzling glare outside,

Jesse Runciman stepped into the darkness of the hovel, he was so blinded at first by the contrast that he could only guess at the sick man's position by the sound of the heavy groaning cries which came from the far corner. Even as he entered, these changed to words.

"Send him away, Baas, send him away! There he stand, by the door! He wait to see the devil catch me!"

Through the twilight of the windowless place he made out, now, the figure of a man lying on a heap of rags and old sacks. It was evident at a glance that not only his days but his hours were numbered. His eyes, fixed on what to all the world beside was vacancy, were glazing fast—even the light of terror had died out of them; his voice alone still testified that he saw and feared.

Runciman came and knelt beside him, taking hold of his hand. Before he could speak, the man cried out again :

"*Allemagtig!* save me! There he stand; his face a bit turned back to me, hanging across his shoulder, and the whites of his eyes turning up. Just so he turn and look at me when the *sjambok* cut the breath out of him!"

He clutched Runciman's hand in a grasp so powerful with terror and the last despairing struggle of life, that the short slight fingers felt crushed in it.

Jesse looked towards the door. There was a perfect simplicity in the movement: not a sign of fear; yet, clearly, he would have been as little surprised to see that spectre as most men would have been at not seeing.

"I don't know what sin you may have done against this man," he said; "but if you have repented and confessed it, neither he nor anyone else can have power to hurt you—for that, at any rate."

"It was twelve years ago; but I never tell," gasped the man; "I was frightened

for the Baas. We all were frightened for him; the Kaffirs as much as me." The sense of a human presence, the contact with substantial flesh and blood, seemed to have quieted him a little. "I tell you the truth, Baas. He was not like any other man. He was too big; he could drink more, and work more, and swear worse than any man you ever see. He could tell what the boys think when they never say anything at all; and I know he have the devil's mark upon him. You not see it all the time; but when he angry, then, on the left cheek, by the eye, it come out and turn——"

Jesse half started to his feet, twisting his hand away. In the moment when he had stood face to face with death, he had seen that scar himself; and he was in the state of mind in which he was prepared to find a miraculous leading in very ordinary coincidences. Outwardly, however, he recovered himself directly; but some sudden

fear of abandonment had startled the man into a fresh paroxysm of terror.

"Go away!" he cried, hoarsely, waving off the invisible phantom with desperate hands. "It is the Baas you should go to, not to me! I did tell a lie about you—that is true; but he did not believe me; he never make a mistake like that. Go to the Baas, then!" He paused a moment. "If I tell, Baas, will he go away?" he asked, with a touch of the shrewd practicalness of the barbarian, even in supreme moments.

"I can't tell you. He will go, I suppose, when He Who has opened your eyes to see him shall see fit to recall him. Maybe it is good for you that he should stay. Or do you think you deserve no punishment? You ought to be glad if you are allowed to take it here."

"It was the Baas," he insisted, with a sort of moaning doggedness. "I must stand well with him, because he know too much.

He know how I come to be all up there—the other side of the Transvaal—all among the black Kaffirs. Because *I* am a Cape boy, Baas," he said, with a faint pride.

"You are a dying man," said Runciman, shortly; "and I wish you would remember it."

"Yes, Baas; but I must stand well with him; and we all know we couldn't please him better than to give him a chance against that Mission Kaffir. We had three or four there. The others were a bad lot, though; but the Baas rather like those. When he find them out in a lie, or see one drunk on the veld, he only laugh, and——"

"This is all nothing—just excuses. Is this a time for them? Say no more about that man. I know something of the sort of account he is likely to have to give. *You* had better prepare for your own."

"I will tell, Baas," he moaned, with renewed shuddering. "I tell you just now—and then you make him go away. There

was always little things stolen from the stores."

"Was that your doing, too?"

"Not all, Baas; only a little. So, at last the Baas, he swear the first man he find out, he flog him within an inch of his life. He never flog much, that is true—he no need of that to keep us afraid—but now he say he would. So it stop for a good bit. Then one day I quarrel with that Mission Kaffir; and then the devil come into me——"

"That's better."

"I put the thing in his tent among his blankets, and then I go and tell the Baas what I find. When I tell him he look at me hard—and then I understand he know all about it. But he only say: 'Show me;' and so I come and show him, and he laugh a little. Then he call all the boys and show them, and he praise me for an honest man; but I rather he swear his worst at me. The Mission Kaffir he beg and pray, and

swear he know nothing about it, but the Baas pretend he tell lies. So he tie him up at once—Baas, so sure as I die just now I never think what happen. We none of us think. He always say his heart is weak, but no one believe him; he always do his work like the rest. The Baas not believe it either, I think. So we stand there; and it was not more as twenty—thirty cuts—it is true what I tell you,—the Baas was a strong man, and hit hard, but it was not more as that—when I see his eyes roll round and his head fall back. I call out: 'Stop, Baas, you make him dead!' He swear at me, for a fool, and a liar, and I suppose he think he faint, for he call out: 'Stand back; I soon make him alive again!' and he strike again two or three times; but the Mission Kaffir he not call out or move any more. So the Baas throw down the whip, and he put his hand over his heart and listen a minute, and then he take some brandy and lift up his head and try to pour it down—but it all run

out. And the Baas got rather white, and pull his beard a bit; and then for maybe five minutes, he and we all just stand so, and nobody say any word at all—and all the time that dead Kaffir's eyes look at me. Then the Baas seem to wake up, and he shake himself a bit. He look round, and then seem like he was going to say something, and then change his mind. He only call out to give orders about taking away the body, and then he send the rest of us back to work, and he walk away. So the boys all go away very quiet, and I go away too, but that Mission Kaffir he stay by me all the time. And he stay by me now!" he shrieked out, suddenly; "he stay by me for ever and ever! Baas, save me! Take him away, make him shut his eyes! It was the Baas. Oh! no, I will say—— Where are you? I can't see you, Baas. I's sorry, I's sorry; don't go away, don't leave me, don't——"

And so on for weary hours still. And

Jesse Runciman, with every nerve stretched to the utmost point of tension, with his whole soul in a tumult of indignation which scarcely left room for horror, had to master himself as best he might, or to turn the nervous excitement which he was powerless to subdue to such little profit as might still be hoped for in a little hopeful case.

It was not till past midnight that it was all over. When Jesse came out of the hovel the full moon was pouring down such floods of light as made of the season of darkness a sort of mystic day. Every leaf on the trees, every little spiky branch of scrub could be seen plainly in this brilliant noon of night; yet it was something of an awful brightness, suggestive of things present beyond those that were revealed.

Jesse passed out of the little hollow, out from under the clear-cut, ink-black shadow of the oaks, into the open blaze of moonlight on the veld. He came to the rock

where he had stood to tell Sarah the story of his encounter, and there he paused. Alone there, in the midnight, he clenched his hands, and his breath came deep and hard.

"Who is this man," he muttered, "that he should defy the armies of the living God?" He laid one hand upon the stone, as on an altar; he looked up, now he spoke aloud. "Hear me!" he said, and his voice was a great deal more like a demand than like a prayer. "Once and twice, in the body and in the spirit, have I met this Thine enemy. Set him before me yet a third time, and I will yet smite him that he shall not be able to stand, but fall under my feet. I will make him so to be had in derision that the very heathen shall laugh him to scorn, saying: 'Is this the man that made the earth to tremble?' I will make a show of him, triumphing openly," he went on, ever more and more wildly. "I will put my hook in his nose, and my bridle in his jaws . . . I will . . . Only set me face to face with him

yet this one time more, and then do Thou so to me, and more also, if I turn back in that day of battle till every word be fulfilled!"

CHAPTER IX.

After all, Sarah got home ten minutes late. This meant that tea was nearly half an hour behind time, because, though the servant-girl knew perfectly well what the hour was, and what work belonged to it, it was not to be supposed that she was going to take any steps towards doing it without a specific order to that effect. If once the "missis" were allowed to find out that she could get any work done without her personal superintendence, what might not be the consequences in the way of "putting upon"? Therefore, Miss Rosina Cornelia Magdalena Petersen (a name so beautiful deserves to be once recorded in full), having, in spite of

the most elaborate dawdling, come to the end of all the work she had actually been told to do, was now sitting by the kitchen table, wrapped in contemplation. A monk of Mount Athos, or a follower of Buddha alone can, perhaps, surpass the coloured working (?) classes in their gift of contemplation. What they think about is a mystery probably never destined to solution, nor does anything ever seem to come of their thinking ; but in these points, perhaps, they do not differ so markedly from their rivals as might be supposed.

Sarah's patience and quietness stood her in good stead in this branch of her domestic troubles. From ceaseless fret and irritation she was much more free than Mattie, who could never be brought to see the futility of losing temper on this point. Now she only gave the neglected order, as a matter of course, and herself hastened the preparations as much as she could.

In the parlour the two men were waiting.

A year ago, in such weather, Sam would probably have sat down to tea in his shirt-sleeves, and even the minister have adopted a costume but little less *dégagé*. Now, both were dressed as those from whom and to whom respect is due. Not a word or hint had ever been breathed upon the subject; in fact, Sarah never knew that there had once been room for such—her mere presence was a rebuke to slovenliness.

The Reverend Joseph sat looking rather demonstratively resigned; Sam, in the window-seat, his knees rather higher than his head, was strumming fitfully on the banjo, with a running commentary. Ostensibly he was practising for some Christmas entertainment, but chiefly he was trying to distract the old man's attention from a growing grievance. Sarah moved in and out with her quiet haste, till at last she was able to say rather timidly:

"Tea is quite ready now, father."

She always gave him this title. She did not like using it, nor did he like to hear it from her; but each thought that the use of it was gratifying to the other. Explanation was scarcely possible, so though the situation would have been far more comfortable without this custom they persevered. The only person really gratified was Sam. He indeed would have felt hurt at any more formal position being taken up, having no great sense of the occasional value of formality.

They all drew their chairs to the table, and the minister said grace with marked deliberation. Then he glanced at the clock on the mantel-piece, a briskly ticking article in a wooden case, with a highly-coloured and altogether imaginative rendering of the Castle of Chillon painted on glass underneath the dial.

"That clock was old Mrs. Hugo's wedding-present to Eliza," he remarked, with apparent irrelevance. "It was one

of the things she was most pleased at getting."

Here Sam, nearly choking himself in the effort, began to whistle, "My Grandfather's Clock," but the diversion was ineffectual.

"'With this beautiful clock,' she said to me, the night we put it up, 'it won't be *my* fault, Joe, if we don't live always up to the minute.' She was a woman with an amazing sense of the value of time, was Eliza."

"I'm sorry to have been so late, father," said poor Sarah. "It was stupid of me to have gone to Tygerfontein at all; I might just as well have given the basket to Mr. Runciman to take, as go myself."

"Has Runciman gone, then?" asked the minister.

"Yes; we went together."

The minister hesitated a moment, in a struggle between his sense of dignity and a natural professional curiosity. Curiosity conquered.

"And what did Runciman say to the fellow?" he asked, with candid interest.

"I don't know. I didn't go in, and I left him there."

"Well, *I* couldn't make anything of him. I told him two or three times over that he couldn't possibly be seeing a ghost, because there were no such things to see; but he wouldn't listen to reason," said the minister in rather an injured tone. "These folks never will."

Sam laughed.

"Well, Runciman wouldn't have said that, anyway," he said. "(Pass the jam, dad. Thanks.) Because he believes in ghosts himself."

"How can you talk such nonsense, Sam," said the minister, somewhat peevishly. "A man of his education to be afraid of ghosts! You know as well as I do that the certificate he holds now would allow him to take a second-class school—not only one of these Mission affairs. And everyone says

he could have easily got a first-class certificate if he cared about it."

"Can't help that," maintained Sam. "But I didn't say he was afraid of ghosts; I said he believed in them. And I know he does that, because he as good as told me so himself."

"Then I wonder at the Central Committee, that's all!" said the minister, indignantly. "But it's just of a piece with all the rest. Of all the——"

"Oh! yes, dad; we all know it was the Central Committee brought in the phylloxera and ran down the price of gold shares," interrupted Sam, with good-humoured impatience. This was a standing grievance of which not even his good nature could tolerate the recital. "But as for this particular job, I don't see what harm's been done there. Runciman's a good sort, and you know it; a bit too high falutin' for me, but you know you thought yourself in luck to get him, at the time. And you didn't ought to round on

him now, dad, because he's never given you cause; and if you take my advice, you'll make the most of him while you can keep him."

"What do you mean?" asked the minister.

The freedom with which these two spoke their minds to each other, and the indifference with which they heard it, were to Sarah constant sources of amazement.

"Why, I guess the Central Committee will be for running him as minister somewhere, some day. And then you may go further for a boss for the school, and maybe fare worse."

A sudden light had come into Sarah's eyes; it was as though she had heard good news. She even began to speak, but the others did not catch the gentle words. Sarah was so little of an independent conversationalist that a remark from her, other than an answer, was never looked for.

"Do you really think that, Sam?" said the minister with some excitement. "Well, if it should be, I don't know that it would be such a bad notion—whosesoever's it may be. I don't know but what he's fitter for that than for a schoolmaster, after all."

The prospect of his own loss he seemed able to bear with very Christian disinterestedness.

"You don't think the ghosts matter for that then, dad, eh?"

"Oh! well, it's a pity, of course—a weakness, certainly a weakness in our brother. But still, perhaps, there are cases—it seems as if it might be convenient sometimes," said the minister. "If one could manage it."

"Don't fancy Runciman's a chap to put much managing into anything he does or don't do," said Sam, rather shrewdly.

The remark was innocent enough, and would naturally have been so accepted. But, unhappily, the minister had caught a glance

from Sarah towards her husband—a glance of mute appeal. Now, as a matter of fact, Sam's remark had been as spontaneous as it was innocent; he had not noticed Sarah's look, being far too much absorbed in the business of the hour. But the minister thought he had, and the thought rankled.

"There's nothing so very smart in taking up a person's words that way, Sam," he said. He spoke with such unprecedented irritability, that Sam, with his cup half-way to his lips, fairly paused to stare, and Sarah looked miserably guilty. "If you can make out any harm I said then, you were spoiled for a lawyer, that's all."

Sam gave a long whistle, and, as ill-luck would have it, winked at Sarah, with an expression as full of meaning in appearance as it was destitute of any in fact.

"Why!" the old man went on, more hotly, "do you suppose that if I had ever thought for a minute that Runciman wasn't an honest man——"

"Oh! bother Runciman," exclaimed Sam, fervently. "I guess we've had enough of him for one while. Let's change the subject." Then seeing the old man was really annoyed, he altered his tone. "Don't be such a precious old duffer, dad," he said, with the extra affectation of bluster with which he always disguised his more affectionate sentiments. "Who's that schoolmaster chap that he should get up a row in this establishment? D'you suppose I'm going to break up the partnership for him? You bet I'd see him or anybody further first."

Sarah forgave him his apparent defection for its pacifying effect on the minister. But, indeed, it was not Sam's repudiation of such an obvious stalking-horse as Runciman that had soothed him. The subject was changed, and a precarious peace reigned till the end of the meal. That over, Sam took up his banjo again, and was sitting down to practise when he suddenly said :

"Oh! by the way, Sarah, did you settle that thing with Killian Smidt?"

"Yes, Sam. I stopped him just after school."

"And what did he say?"

"He said——" began Sarah, readily enough; and there she stopped. For, of the but half-comprehended message every word had slipped her memory. Far other words, far other interests, had set every long-pent-up fountain of emotion flowing, and in the rush all this matter, alien, though so dutifully cultivated, had been swept away. "He said——" she faltered again.

The minister had stopped on his way to the door. He was looking at her, and Sarah knew he was meditating Eliza, and it made her mind more blank than ever. She stood with one hand on the back of a chair, the other fidgeting with the corner of her apron. Of all the people she had ever met, the minister alone had the power to make this quiet, even-minded woman

nervous. Her very conscientiousness put a weapon in his hand.

"Well, old lady," said Sam, lightly—he had not been looking at her; so that her trouble passed unobserved — "go ahead! So far, the court is entirely with you."

"Sam, I am very, very sorry. I thought I knew it quite well, but I have forgotten."

The minister coughed. Sam gave a rather disconcerted whistle.

"And I must know before the cart goes in to-morrow!" he exclaimed. Then he stood up, and saw Sarah's face. "Oh, well," he said, cheerfully, "I'll just run round and find out about it now. And don't you worry, old girl, because it really don't signify one brass farthing."

"Oh, Sam," she cried, "I will go; it's my business. I was too stupid—I had no right—I'll go directly."

But he stopped her.

"No, old lady, that you don't!" he said, positively. "You'll just stop where you are,

and rest. You've been all over the shop this afternoon, in this grilling weather, and I know you've been just racing all the way back from Tygerfontein not to keep us happy-go-lucky beggars waiting. You should have just seen our goings on before you came, that's all! Oh, lor', it was a caution! No; you don't go another walk to-day."

"Oh, Sam, I must go," she pleaded.

"You shut up, missis," was all she could obtain "I'm your boss, you know, and you've got to mind me; and I just say you shan't."

He took her by the shoulders, and pushed her down into the minister's own particular chair. She protested no more; she even smiled a little. Few women would be very resentful of such despotism as this. To Sarah, it was new, indeed, to be taken care of, and though she could scarcely be said, in any conventional sense, to love her husband, she liked that it should be he who did it.

Sam went off, and did not observe that the minister was still in the room.

When they were left alone, he came forward. "My dear Sarah," he began.

She started up from the chair as if she had been detected in a sacrilege. He motioned her to sit down again.

"Your husband kindly wishes you to rest, my dear," he said; "and the best you can do for him *now* is to stay, as he told you."

Sarah sat down, humbly, in what might as well have been one of the red-hot chairs of the Inquisition for all the comfort she had in it any more. The minister remained standing, in an attitude suggestive of the pulpit.

"My dear Sarah," he began again, "I have a few words to say to you."

"Yes, father."

"You've got a good husband."

"Oh, father, I know!" she exclaimed, distressfully.

"And I'm bound to say that I don't think you do your duty by him."

Sarah sat with bent head, silent. She could scarcely have spoken without tears, and to cry might have seemed to reproach him. His own conscience did reproach him bitterly enough for the injustice. He went on with the more irritation.

"You always seem to be going about with your head in the clouds. It's a woman a man wants in his wife, not a—a—high-flyin' angel as this world's too good for," he said, lapsing into the vernacular as the natural man asserted itself more and more. "You don't have no feeling for what he cares for, not so much as to take a message right—and that's the way of it all! Because he ain't always on the high horse, like some folks, that ain't to say as he's a wicked worldling, only fit to be prayin' for. It's doin' for him as is your business a deal more than the other thing. Charity begins at home, and so do duty; and if a woman

does all as is wanted in that line, it's little need she'll have to be lookin' further. And now I've spoke my mind, as was *my* duty."

She controlled her voice enough to say, "I've tried, father ; but I'll try harder."

But he was in no mood to be softened by a meekness which did but embitter his sense of the wrong he was doing her.

"Well, bear it in mind," he said, ungraciously. And he left the room, trying to look as though he were pleased with himself, but, to his credit, with very poor success.

As with Jesse Runciman, so with the minister : his trial had come in a way for which he was not prepared. In forecasting the situation, he had, indeed, thought himself armed at all points. He knew that he should dislike it, that it would make serious demands on his generosity and forbearance. But there had been one flaw in his calculations : secretly, he had always calculated on Sam's disliking it too. When he found

that Sam, who had begun by respecting, had ended by very heartily loving his wife, he felt himself, as it were, deceived. He could not but see that the situation was altered materially for the worse, so far as he was concerned. In short, in his calculations, Sarah was to have been the third party ; and he had thought the arrangement would be a nuisance even thus. Now he began to suspect that before long the third party might be himself, and it became something a great deal more serious than a nuisance.

When the minister was gone Sarah rose slowly, and kept her eyes and voice in order while she helped 'Sina to clear the table. Then she got out her work-basket, and sat down—and then thinking was too much for her. She did not actually cry, but time after time, brush them away as perseveringly and as self-reproachfully as she would, the tears gathered in her eyes.

What should she do ? With everything

to learn and none to teach her, she had tried her very best to do her duty; had tried to see good in the very absence of enthusiasm, to set the fairly large amount of work actually done against the want of every trace of spirituality in the doing of it. She could not lower her standard, but she had tried hard to widen her range. And it all seemed to be of no use. Her husband could do without her; her father-in-law not only could, but gladly would have done so.

Spiritual sympathy she found none; as for spiritual work, she had found more at home. She remembered Mr. Noakes' words about prayers being answered in judgment, and, wearied and harassed, suffering too, though she did not know it, from that reaction of sheer exhaustion which Jesse Runciman was capable of producing not in himself alone, she tormented herself, with a morbidness very unusual in her, as to whether something in her own case might not have deserved such chastisement.

And then, all at once, as if called up by the mere mental allusion to that scene, there rose up before her, as in a vision, every detail of the old house in Castlegate—the school-room, the garden, the parlour; and in a moment, every other feeling was swallowed up in a rush of desperate home-sickness. Oh! to be back, to be back! Oh, her children! all the old life that was! If only she could hear! Perhaps in the holidays some of them would write; she knew well it would not be before. It wanted three weeks to Christmas still, then three weeks' post—nearly two months, after all, before she could hope even for a letter. Her own children that she loved! To see them all once more! to feel the imperious pull of little hands upon her gown, the little warm wet lips upon her cheek! What were they doing? who mothered them now? Lucy and Annie, and poor Lizzie that they feared would grow up deformed. There was one child who, in the long dark

nights of winter, used to wake up from her first sleep sobbing and screaming in paroxysms of nervous terror. Sarah used to manage to find something to do in the dormitory at that hour, and be at hand to soothe the poor little breaker of an iron law. The long dark nights had come again; who would quiet her, who stand between her and punishment now?

The tears overflowed at last, they dropped heavily upon her sewing; her distress was too visible to be capable of an instant's concealment. And at this moment, of all others, Sam suddenly banged into the room.

"I came back for my banjo," he said. "I thought, as I should be in those parts, I might as well drop in and give Roberts a lesson. He wants to learn and—— Hulloa! old girl, what's up?"

She passed her handkerchief across her eyes in a misery of shame.

"Nothing, Sam," she said, earnestly, "nothing at all."

He pulled away the ineffectual disguise with a sort of rough kindness, and forced her round to the light.

"Come, that won't do, you know," he said. "Remember your bringing up, missis, and don't tell taradiddles. What is it now? Has anybody been badgering you?" he went on, with a sudden suspicion.

Sarah would have given anything in the world to have controlled herself then, but her spirits were just in that state when a word of kindness is fatal: she broke down into helpless sobbing.

"The guv'nor has been slanging you again, I know," he said, and his tone was so seriously annoyed that sheer dread of worse complications checked Sarah's tears.

"Sam, indeed — indeed — I am only crying because I am so stupid, because I am——"

She was about to say "home-sick;" but when he was so kind how could she hurt him by seeming to pine for a home with

which he had never had one bond of interest?

"Now can you tell me he hasn't said one blessed word to you since I went?" asked Sam.

"Sam, indeed," she pleaded again, "he said nothing but what I deserved. It was right for him to do it; I'm glad to have somebody to tell me things. I want it often and often."

"Oh! of course you do," he said, as sarcastically as he could compass—which was nothing very bitter; "you're a shocking bad lot, and it's only everybody's bounden duty to shy stones and jump upon you, ain't it?" He stooped down and kissed her, rather awkwardly. "Cheer up, old lady," he said. "Come, now, I can't leave you like this, and I've got a jolly lot to do this evening still. Cheer up, there's a good girl. Come!"

He would not go, in fact, till he had left her outwardly composed; perhaps

more comfort than she quite knew herself, had begun to creep even into her heart.

If she had known him better, she might have thought it ominous that he should not have said another word about the minister, either in defence or in reprobation. But she was spared the addition to her troubles, which a comprehension of the meaning of this fact would have supplied.

Indeed, Sam was really angry, too angry to let off his annoyance in mere swagger. If he had even loved Sarah less, he would still have resented the consistent injustice of the minister's behaviour towards her. That he did happen to love, as well as to be bound to protect her, did not tend to make him more lenient. And, tact not being one of his strong points, he could think of nothing better to do than to go off and "have it out with the guv'nor," as he expressed it, then and there.

He found the old man in the garden at the back of the house. He was a bit of

a flower-fancier in his way, and now he was stooping over a pet fuchsia.

"Back already, Sam?" he said. "Look here; I believe it's coming out double this year. That must have been the——"

He was speaking quite pleasantly again now; gardening had a wonderfully good effect on his temper. But Sam was not to be so easily appeased.

"I say, dad," he interrupted, rather abruptly, "what have you been saying to Sarah?"

"She's been complaining," thought the minister, at once. "I felt it my duty to say a few words to her," he said, very stiffly. "If a young woman can't take a few words of Christian exhortation in a proper spirit, I'm very sorry, of course; but it doesn't make any difference as to what *I* ought to do."

"Christian exhortation!" repeated Sam. "I'd just like to have heard it, that's all!" He paused a moment, then went on with unwonted decision. "Well, look here, dad,

when I think my wife's in want of exhortation, I'll give it her myself; and till *I* think so, I'll just trouble you to leave it alone."

"If my conscience, Samuel, requires——"

"Well, then, you must just spiflicate your conscience! But you know your conscience has no more to do with it than that!" he said, snapping his fingers impatiently. "If it tells you anything at all, I'll bet you anything you please it's just the other way. It's a shame, dad, a burning shame!" he went on, more hotly, beginning to pace up and down the garden walk. "I wouldn't have believed it of you! Here's as good a wife as ever a man had, and as good a daughter, too, and yet you're everlastingly slanging her or jawing at her round the corner, which is as bad. If she wasn't next thing to a saint, she wouldn't put up with a day of it—and"—he faced round suddenly, and stood still—"and I'll be hanged if I put up with it any longer for her! So now you know!"

He turned on his heel, and marched off, without giving a chance for anything more, were it recrimination or submission.

Which would it have been? The minister stood looking after him with an expression of blank dismay which had its inwardly tragic as well as its outwardly comic side. Then he frowned, and tried to nurse up his resentment for a bit. He turned back to his gardening, and bent over his flowers as before. But, all at once, one precious bud fell, nipped off short by a tremulous movement of a hand which was not so steady as before. And if Sam could have seen his face, he might have relented even from his just anger.

CHAPTER X

The Christmas holidays came, and Runciman took his wife down to Somerset Strand. Beulah, shut in on all sides, was hot and relaxing, and Mattie (though she certainly did not make the least of her ailments) was really not well, and needed the change.

At the Strand she had a few weeks of real enjoyment. The place was crowded with visitors, chiefly from Kimberley; there was no haughty exclusiveness about them: they were sociable, very demonstrative, and Mattie got as much gaiety and admiration as her heart could wish. It was a return to the world, the more delightful that it was

unexpected and unhoped for; since, to the world, she had bidden, in spirit, a sorrowful and as she believed an eternal farewell when she drove away from the docks at Cape Town. Mattie was not too particular as to the quality of the admiration she met with; she had a very catholic spirit on this point, and, though not incapable of appreciating the refined, she was tolerant also of the merely well-intentioned.

And she really did make a sensation. Deny it as they may, there is probably no Colonial heart in which there does not lurk a sort of envious respect for the Englishman born. And, besides the claim to something like deference, however well disguised as patronage, which she owed to her nationality, Mattie's own personality gave her another. Far less of a lady in heart and mind than the homely-mannered Sarah, this girl was yet susceptible of an external polish which the other never acquired. She was not a lady, but she was

a much better imitation of one than is often found, and among the visitors at the Strand she might well have passed for the real thing. She had an innate taste in the matter of dress, which alone would have marked her out in that company. Her voice was refined, and her laugh—a rare gift—musical. She was dainty all over, with a sort of infantine daintiness, not too ethereal to be delicious, but enough so to be enchanting. From the worst forms of mental vulgarity she had been saved by her training; Miss Grover's establishment could no more have been vulgar in tone than it would ever be polished in manners. But on this point nature and circumstances had come to Mattie's aid: she was instinctively imitative of the forms of good breeding; and she had been in love with a gentleman. It may be that she had seldom thought of him again—and, to do her justice, she had never consciously dwelt on the thought—but Gerald Blake had

been no unimportant factor in Mattie's education.

So it came to pass that among the crowd of gorgeous Jewesses, amiable Dutch *vrouws*, and Colonial girls of the period, Mattie shone like a star. She got, indeed, so much attention that it seemed rather wonderful that she did not find Runciman jealous. But she received it all with so much levity, the whole was so obviously the merest surface froth of social amusement, that unless he had parted with the last vestige of common-sense, even Jesse could scarcely have disturbed himself seriously about a state of things so patently superficial. In fact, Mattie would have endured nothing else. After the constant oppression of a nature which, equally in its bad points and in its good ones, was infinitely too passionate for her, she found a positive refreshment, an invigoration, merely in superficiality.

However, he did not enjoy himself, and

he was glad when it was time to go back. He had behaved quite well and quietly during the whole visit; nothing had been said or done that could startle or offend her. Nevertheless, there were indications which, if she could have read them aright, might have proved valuable for future guidance. There was the strange triumph which came into his face as soon as they left the railway station and got into the cart which was to take them back to Beulah; there was a certain levity of spirits with which he surprised her during the drive—a levity so unusual, so unnatural in him as to point to the relaxation of some extreme nervous tension; there was the sort of passion of ownership with which he looked at her and touched her all that evening. But there was nothing in Mattie, either intellectual or emotional, which could have helped her to read signs so slight. If she thought about his mood at all, it was to suppose that Jesse had been bored and was glad to have got

away; all the ladies at the Strand had agreed that gentlemen never did know what to do with themselves in a holiday.

For her own part, hers had made a different creature of her. She came back looking wonderfully better in health and spirits; it was marvellous to see how she had shaken off her nervousness and oppression so soon as she was released from the moral and physical forcing-house in which she had been so long pent up. On the other hand, she was sillier and more flippant. It was much the same mood as she had got into on the voyage, but with the sentiment left out, and pure gratified vanity substituted for it. That sentiment might have been silly enough, but it had been also a genuine, and, largely, an unselfish one; and the change now was not for the better.

But Jesse, to whom she had suddenly become rather more responsive in a giggling, pert kind of way, had no fault to find with a state of spirits which put such a

sparkle into her eye, such a peach-bloom upon her cheek—a condition in which every physical charm was enhanced by a coquetry which, by means of a sham resistance, fired his blood with all the excitement of a real victory.

And if he, for his own reasons, saw nothing amiss, Sarah, for her part, was too glad to see her little girl bright and merry again, to have much heart for remonstrance, even at Mattie's worst outbreaks of saucy silliness. Sarah had no great gift for subtle distinctions; to her the girl's mood seemed to differ little from what she had known well in her at home. And of all sense of special responsibility for Mattie's moral well-being she was now relieved. Would not Jesse Runciman's wife be in good keeping?

January passed. School had been re-opened for some three weeks; to outward appearance everything was going on as usual. There seemed no reason why, in that retired spot, any change, other than

what was brought about by the slow, disintegrating forces of mere time, should ever come.

Then one morning towards the middle of February the minister came into the kitchen where Sarah was engaged, with an open letter in his hand, and told her briefly that she must get the spare bedroom ready, for a visitor was coming that day—a gentleman. He vouchsafed no details, though the advent of a visitor to Beulah was an almost unprecedented event. He never did give Sarah any information. If she happened not to be in the way when he told any given piece of news to Sam she might never have heard it at all, so far as Mr. Glasse was concerned. And that day it happened that Sam had started soon after daybreak for the Paarl, on business connected with the shops, and was not expected home till evening.

So now the minister gave his orders and went off. Sarah scarcely noticed this as a discourtesy. The discipline at Marston had

enforced such unquestioning obedience to unexplained and often seemingly purposeless commands that thus to obey had become a second nature. She had not even yet begun to feel that she had any right to explanations. She got the room ready and thought no more about it.

The minister came back in the middle of the day, and they had a *tête-à-tête* dinner; the meal was not of the liveliest description, and conversation did not flourish. Sarah ventured to ask whether the guest would come back with Sam; but he said he did not know—did it make any difference? and as she could not honestly say it did, this subject fell dead like the others.

Domestic affairs kept her at home all the afternoon; towards sunset—earlier in that narrow valley than elsewhere—she was able to get free for a while. It was near the time when Sam might be expected back; she went down to the garden gate and stood looking along the road. She was conscious,

if not of a certain disappointment, at least of no extra elevation of spirits when the empty stretch of shady road was invaded, not by the cart, but by the buxom figure of Mrs. Davis.

Mrs. Davis halted at the gate, but when Sarah asked her to step inside—an offer prompted by unmitigated duty—she declined.

"Not now, my dear," she said, in a tone which permitted a hope in the hearer that this misfortune might be repaired by-and-bye. "I've been all round the place this afternoon, and I must be gettin' home. Besides, you'll be havin' company along directly, won't you? lookin' out for it now, ain't you? And I'm that hot and dusty and all to pieces, I'd be ashamed, for Davis' sake, that the new schoolmaster should see me for the first time so. It ain't fit; not in Davis' position."

Sarah was too much stunned to betray herself. She just caught hold of one of

the wooden spikes at the top of the gate; for a moment Mrs. Davis' voice grew indistinct to her ears; it murmured on and on, but all it said to her was "the new schoolmaster," and this it repeated many times over before there came a pause indicating a question.

"I beg your pardon, ma'am; I didn't hear," she said, mechanically.

"You feel the heat above a bit, don't you?" said Mrs. Davis, sympathetically. "I mind 'twas just the same with me first year I came out; I used to get such fainty turns Davis was fairly scared. But you'll soon get used to it. I was only sayin' you'll miss your little friend, won't you? To be sure, it's a fine rise for her; not but what all them that know about things have been lookin' for it this year or more."

"Have they?" said Sarah.

"Well!" exclaimed Mrs. Davis, rather huffily; "I should think you might know, if any one did! I suppose to-day ain't the first

time such a thing was ever talked about in *this* house. I'm sure no one hates gossip worse than me; but there's no call to be so close as all that between friends. If 'twas *you* as were goin' to be a minister's wife, you couldn't be more particular. I'm thinkin' you're better cut out for it than your friend is."

As much pride as her gentle nature could contain, helped Sarah's loyalty in suppressing the questioning cry that rose to her lips; and both together only just sufficed to do it.

"Not as I've a word to say against Mattie Runciman," said Mrs. Davis, suddenly reflecting that, under the circumstances, this was a little too much like crying down her own wares. "Maybe she's not quite so stirrin' a body as might be looked for in a minister's wife; though she's brisked up wonderful of late, too. Like enough, 'tis this place takes it out of her. A hole it is, as I tell Davis, and a

hole it always will be ; and many's the time as washed-out rags has been *my* feelin's, and will be again ; though I don't hold with givin' in. But, there ! she is but young yet, to be sure ; and if 'twas the time at the Strand as set her up so, why, everybody says as the air there ain't to be named in the same day with Kimberley — which Beaconsfield's all the same—so it'll be a good thing all round. But I'm thinkin' you'll miss her, won't you ?" With which, Mrs. Davis wandered onwards.

Sarah almost ran up the path towards the house. If, after all, there might still be time to get over to the school ! For, oh ! what must Mattie be thinking of her ? But the clock was on the stroke of six. Impossible to venture, with Sam, or the guest, or both, to be expected every minute. She turned, and went, slowly enough now, into her own room, and there fought out the hardest battle for forgiveness which she had yet known in all her quiet life. For

she knew that there had been no accidental omission, that news which all day long had been the property of the whole village, had been wilfully kept from her to whom, of all others, it was matter of most concern. Ah! of how much concern? Not at this time, with the necessity of outward composure at least laid upon her, did she dare to begin to think how terribly alone she was going to be left.

After all, Sam and the guest arrived together, Sam having happened to be passing the station just as the stranger was engaging a cart for Beulah. Mr. Reeves was a commonplace sort of man, of about five-and-thirty, with a tendency to book-language when he was nervous, as he was now, and, in general, with a cheerily-obsequious manner more suggestive of a shopwalker or a commercial traveller than of a schoolmaster. Yet a schoolmaster, and a successful one, he had been for many years.

He was very polite to Sarah, apologizing profusely for "making so sudden a demand on her hospitality. But, you know, madam, the first duty of a schoolmaster, as of a soldier, is obedience. He will never command who has not learnt to obey."

"See Standard V. copy-book," muttered Sam. On him, no less than on Sarah, the mine had been sprung unexpectedly, and he had not taken kindly to the innocent cause of his surprise during their eighteen miles' drive. Though, indeed, poor Mr. Reeves may be dismissed at once as nothing worse than a well-intentioned bore. Indeed, when sure of his position, he was scarcely even a bore; but this evening, naturally enough, he was not feeling very sure of anything. These Jack-in-the Box sort of effects were favourites with the Central Committee. They were held to promote discipline.

"I fear Mrs. Runciman (I understand there is such a lady?) will have been put

to even greater inconvenience. Mrs. Reeves, I may say, had her composure much disturbed yesterday by the intelligence. Not so much on account of any—as I might say—dislike to the change," he explained, hastily, "but owing to the suddenness of the notice."

"Why, they're both to be allowed three weeks, ain't they?" asked Sam, not so amiably as usual. He was really sorry for Sarah, though he had no suspicion how much she deserved his pity, and he hated what he called "foolery," under which head he classed together the language of Mr. Reeves and the disciplinary measures of the Central Committee. And these two feelings rather ruffled his temper.

"Three weeks, I believe, is the time," said Mr. Reeves, with an inward sigh at the prospect for himself—an unwilling trespasser on an unenthusiastic hospitality. "Three weeks from next Monday. I am given to understand that Mr. Runciman is

to be presented in Cape Town as a candidate for the ministry on this next ensuing Sabbath; and the period of examination and preparation will extend from that day till the third Sabbath after. He will then, as I understand, receive his recognition, and proceed at once to the scene of his new duties."

"And is Mrs. Runciman to wait here?" asked Sarah. She felt as though she really must ask something.

"That, I believe, is the arrangement. She will require the time — at least, I gathered from expressions of Mrs. Reeves' that *her* arrangements would certainly take no less. And it is also considered well by the Committee that the candidate should pass this period free from all carnal — I would say from all distrac — that is — I mean——"

But here he got so hopelessly and miserably confused that Sam took pity on him, and changed the subject.

As for the minister, he was extremely quiet. He did not feel at all aggressively pleased with himself for his behaviour that day; so little pleased that he was prepared to receive even forgiveness meekly — a point to which he did not often come when it was Sarah who held the right of pardon. Perhaps the message he had had to bear that morning had touched his conscience through his memory. He, too, though his spiritual temperament, at its best, had little enough in common with that of Jesse Runciman, had once known emotions, hopes, resolves, to which the event had hardly answered. It may be that he could have wished it otherwise. Those of us are fortunate who can look back, even from middle-age, upon the aspirations of our youth without a pang of something akin to remorse.

He scarcely spoke at all till they rose from table; then, turning to the new-comer, he said:

"I suppose you won't care about going down to the school this evening, Mr. Reeves? I think I may say you'll find everything in very good order; a quarter-of-an-hour to-morrow morning will quite set you straight with it all. And, you see, this is a serious thing for a young man; and Runciman seemed a good deal—a good deal taken aback, when I told him, and I fancy he'd as soon not be disturbed to-night, if you didn't mind."

Was it a not ungenerous envy that he felt? was it compassion? Whatever it was, it lent to his voice a note more sympathetic than, perhaps, any one present had ever heard in it before.

Mr. Reeves eagerly disclaimed any desire to anticipate the morrow; and everyone stood for a few minutes in an awkward doubt as to where to go, or what to do next, till Sam proposed that they should have a pipe on the stoep. Mr. Reeves assented with alacrity, the

minister with relief, and the three went out together.

The minister did not stay long; he was not quite in tune with his ordinary world, that evening. Sarah heard him come in and go to his room. The other two remained, and, by degrees, under the soothing influence of tobacco, seemed to be getting on better together. Reeves became less stilted, and Arkwright more friendly; they dropped into natural talk—the little gossip of Cape Town and the suburbs; harmless, trivial, unelevating chat. Now and then they laughed a little.

The laughter, disjointed fragments of the talk, were caught by Sarah as she sat by the open window, at the other end of the stoep, and, for a moment, her soul rebelled. This, then, was what she was to be left to; this all her compensation for the loss of the one being in all her world with whom she had spiritual affinity!

She checked the murmur, even as it

arose. But her sewing dropped upon her lap; she looked out into the darkness—the darker for the lamp within. The night was sown thick with stars; just above the black towering mass of the great eucalyptus near the gate, hung the four silver points of the Southern Cross; the luminous trail of Magellan's Cloud lay swept athwart the further sky towards the mountains. Her eyes did not seek the stars; they looked to the gate, to the shadowy line of road, and then on, in spirit, right through the village to a white, thatched house, among oak-trees.

What was he doing? what feeling, that night? "Runciman seemed a good deal taken aback:" that was all she had heard—so little, so poorly put, yet it seemed to her to imply everything that she would have expected. In this moment even Mattie became a secondary consideration.

There would be hours and days to come when the mere human heart of the woman would ache and hunger for her little girl;

but the time was not now. Her wonderings, her speculations, turned into purest longings for blessings on this soul, come to a great crisis ; her longings made themselves wings and mounted up as prayers.

And, indeed, he needed such ; how greatly, how urgently, no one would ever know so well as—in these first hours, at least—he knew it, and acknowledged it himself.

CHAPTER XI.

After all, it was not till the next afternoon that Sarah got down to the school. 'Sina was as much demoralized by the one modest guest, as though he had been a regiment of dragoons. She would do little but giggle and chatter, and such work as she did put her hand to, was done in a style to entail more trouble on her mistress than if she had left it alone. But when, at last, there was no work remaining which the girl could either leave undone or do wrong, Sarah set off with a sense of deliverance.

Through the open window of the school-room, the sing-song murmur of children's voices came wafted as always; but the tones

which, now and again, stilled or directed theirs, were different.

The house door stood open; Sarah knocked and went in, as she was used to do, without waiting for an answer. Yet, when she had gone into the parlour and found it empty, there was a sense of change which left her hesitating strangely as to what to do. She went out again into the passage, and at the same moment, Mattie opened the kitchen door and saw her.

"Oh! Sarah, is that you?" she said. "Go into the parlour and sit down, there's a dear. I'll be with you in half-a-minute."

Sarah went back, and somehow she felt a little suppressed. She had learned, on the voyage, that Mattie could patronize, on occasion; she had never quite learned to stand up against her patronage. She never dreamed of resenting it; but there was no mood—not even the giddiest—in which she found the better part of Mattie so hard to get at.

When the latter did come in, after a rather long half-minute, it was with something of the uncertain dignity—half tentative, half exultant—of a very little child conscious of a new frock.

"I was beginning to make the inventory," she said; "but there's plenty of time, really, isn't there? Sit down, won't you? and have a good talk; I have lots to tell you. I thought you'd have been in yesterday," she added, a little reproachfully.

"It wasn't my fault," said Sarah—perhaps for the first time in her life.

"I'm sure it wasn't," said Mattie, with a little compunction expressing itself in a caress. "And I ought to have come up to see you—you good old thing—but people were in and out just from morning till night. I declare I hadn't time to turn round!"

The conscious exultation in her voice was, like her manner, really too childlike to be offensive.

"Weren't you surprised, when you heard?" she went on, with a certain gleefulness. "*I* was; well, I am still! It seems so funny!" and here she passed into the giggling stage. "Anna Marais was here this morning; she's so ridiculous! she would keep on asking after his reverence, and wanting to write the labels: Rev. J. Runciman! She did write it all over a half sheet of his exercise paper, but I threw it in the fire. So silly! and he isn't that yet, either, is he?"

Sarah had never been able to help a secret wonder at Mattie's persistence in this sort of school-girl friendship with Anna Marais. With all her charity she could not feel it to be an improving one, and it did seem a little strange to her that Runciman should not see this himself, and check it. But, even if a natural dislike to interference had not restrained her, it was obvious that to argue with Mattie, in her present mood, would have

been lost labour. Sarah knew this of old, and did not try.

"Is Mr. Runciman gone, then?" she asked, with some surprise.

"Oh! no; he isn't to go till to-morrow, the Committee gentlemen said, so as to put the new man into the way of things, if he wants it. But Mr. Reeves seems to be getting on pretty well; it's rather lucky, so far as any good he's likely to get out of Jesse goes. Well! I believe they did spend half-an-hour over the registers and things together this morning, when Mr. Glasse brought him down; but I had run over to Mrs. Davis', so I can't be sure even of that. But Johanna said so."

"Mr. Runciman must feel a great deal about this."

"I suppose he does. At least, when Mr. Glasse told him yesterday, he turned as white as a sheet, and he seemed so upset that Mr. Glasse said the assistant might finish keeping school; Jesse needn't go back. It

was very kind of him, I'm sure; what a dear old gentleman he is, Sarah, isn't he? I do like him!"

"I'm glad, dearie," said poor Sarah, gently. "He does bear his people on his heart before the Lord, I'm sure; all of them."

"So, then Jesse thanked him, and went right off and shut himself into that half-furnished room at the back, you know—that room we've never wanted; and that's the last I've seen of him. He won't let anybody in. But Johanna was awfully frightened last night, because she heard him speaking; she's such a goose! she would have it there were spooks in there, and he was talking to them."

"Mattie darling," entreated Sarah, "what has come to you this afternoon?"

Mattie looked up, with a half formed intention of being saucy; then, with the action of a child told that it is making mother sorry, she blushed, hung her head, nestled up to

Sarah's side in a silent plea for forgiveness, and so sat quiet for about fifteen seconds.

"Well," she said, "then you'll like to see him again, before he goes, won't you? I'll go and tell him you're here; I daresay he'll come out for you."

She rose, and moved towards the door; Sarah sprang up in real distress.

"No, no; what are you going to do? Pray, pray, Mattie, don't disturb him!"

But Mattie walked on unheeding. Sarah followed, still begging her to stop. They had both reached the door of the room where he was, and Mattie's hand was raised to knock, when she paused. What she heard stopped her. From within came the sound of speech, as she had said; but voice and words came broken and interrupted. He was weeping aloud.

Sarah drew back a step; she looked, as it were, shocked. With an instinct truer than her traditions she felt ashamed at having intruded, even thus unwittingly, upon

the privacy of a soul. Mattie stood a moment; then she jerked her chin a little and turned away; her expression was a curious mixture of pity and impatience.

"Oh! well," she said, "never mind; it's no use, you see, just now, is it? He doesn't start till about eleven to-morrow morning; perhaps he'll be going up to the minister's before that, and you may see him then. Come back and let's finish our talk. I haven't half said what I wanted. It will be nice to be in a real big place, won't it? with lots going on. I wish it was Kimberley, not Beaconsfield—it would look better on letters and that; though, of course, with the 'bus, it's really all the same thing. And I *do* wish he was to have a decent sort of congregation! I think it's downright waste, after the education they've given him, to go and set him nothing but a lot of low native locations to look after; but I suppose it's because he can talk Kafir. He'd have made a lovely preacher, don't you think so?

I'm sure people would have gone after him a lot. Anna Marais said that their Lena told her after last prayer-meeting——"

But this valuable opinion was never transmitted—not to Sarah, at any rate; for just as they reached the parlour, another of Mattie's now numerous visitors was seen coming up the garden, and Sarah was glad enough of the excuse for making her escape.

Mattie spent the rest of the day in a whirl of work, half of which was quite unnecessary, and in chatter, of which to say that it was unnecessary would be to speak too leniently. Even Sarah was scarcely sooner out of sight than she was out of mind; as for Jesse, if Mattie thought of him at all it would be hard to say exactly how her thoughts ran. She was not indifferent to his comfort; she looked over his clothes and did everything that the most affectionate wife could have done to provide for all his requirements while he should be away. Of this Mattie was very capable; her silliness was chiefly

moral, practically, when she was not lazy she was a very good housewife indeed—clever rather than otherwise, both with head and hands, in all domestic work.

But for anything higher, her feeling might have been fairly summed up in the words: "Oh! *I* have nothing to do with *that*." Only a few weeks ago she would have affirmed the same, but she would have felt it resentfully. It was no good symptom that now she took it lightly. She had begun to acquiesce in the position in his life which he himself had first assigned her. Yet, however much in the wrong she might be now, however much in the wrong she might put herself hereafter, it could never be denied that she had, to the best of her ability, made a very fair start. Of course, she was not a woman who could ever have raised a man's standard, or have shamed him by her very personality out of making her the object of a merely sensual passion.

But she would have been quite willing, at

first, to have allowed Jesse to drag her up to his own standard, or as near it as her capacities might enable her to go. And, unless it had been quite of late, when excited vanity had for a while mastered, rather than made her forget, that secret underlying constitutional repugnance—she had certainly never been guilty of amusing herself with deliberately playing upon his weakness. The first failure had undoubtedly been his —and yet, fail as he might, the situation in which he could scarcely do otherwise had not been of his own seeking.

She was resolved that Jesse should at least allow her an interview long enough to give all necessary directions and explanations before he went. As a house-mistress she could be despotic, and was not disposed to tolerate shirking, on any plea. But she was not called upon to exercise her authority on this occasion. Rather to her surprise, he appeared next morning at the usual hour for family prayers, con-

ducted them in a restrained sort of way, without any special allusion, or variation from the ordinary form, and then sat down to breakfast with her with scarcely a word. He looked very much more subdued than he had done for a long time—was pale and grave, and when he spoke his voice was so low and quiet that Mattie scarcely knew it. He ate very little, but he made no display of any kind ; all Mattie's questions he answered clearly and sensibly, making notes for her of the chief things for which she would have to arrange. She was perfectly delighted. That he was getting momentarily more and more beyond the point of quietness—where, if he could have stopped, it would have been desirable indeed—into a state of the most miserable depression, she was not able to see.

After breakfast, she sent him off to do his packing, and it was not till shortly before the time he had to start that she saw him again. She was busy in the kitchen when she heard him moving about the house,

apparently seeking something, and she called out to him.

"What is it?" she said, when he came in. "Were you looking for Johanna? I've had to send her up to Welgelegen to see if they can lend me a bottle of that stuff they use for the fowl-sickness; one of our hens is just dead, and I believe it is going through the lot. Such a nuisance! they've always kept so well, and I thought Mrs. Reeves would take them off my hands, and be glad. But I'll get you anything you want."

"I don't want anything. It was you I wanted to speak to before I go."

"Well, will it do if you stay here? Because, you see, I'm getting your dinner ready for you to take with you, and the cart will be round pretty soon."

She was standing by the table, cutting away diligently at a great home-baked loaf as she spoke. She looked exquisitely pretty. She was excited, joyously excited, and excite-

ment always became her ; she was so made for a quick-pulsing vitality, that, in order perfectly to fulfil the ideal on which Nature had formed her, her blood must needs be dancing. The glow of the fire, from which she had just come away, had flushed her cheek with a crimson none too vivid for her style of beauty. Her sleeves she had rolled back for her work, and her round, firm white arms seemed to be only displayed to more advantage with every movement. Mattie's hands, though small and pretty and well-kept, did yet show traces of downright manual labour, but her arms were lovely.

Jesse remained standing near the door ; his eyes, cast on the ground, followed mechanically the windings of some stain in the floor of beaten earth, and of all he might have had to say no word came.

"Well ?" said Mattie, a little impatiently.

"Haven't you got anything to say to *me* ?" he said.

He raised his eyes suddenly, and the

look in them, which was always most pathetic in the rare moments of his humility, seemed to implore help for the weak, insurgent soul against its temporarily slumbering oppressor. It was to ask succour from an ally whom he himself had largely helped to render powerless.

"No, I don't think there's anything more," said Mattie, reflectively, pausing a moment in her operations; "everything was pretty well arranged at breakfast, wasn't it? We really got through much quicker than I thought for."

"I didn't mean—" he said, and broke off—"that is, I meant—Mattie, don't forget to pray for me while I'm away."

He said it with an awkwardness of which he felt ashamed, with some reason. The undisguised amazement with which she opened her eyes upon him—eyes from which the bewitching earthly sparkle had scarcely had time to die into a proper demureness—completed his humiliation.

"Oh," she said, "very well; but I expect I don't know much about it."

With his principles, the only answer he could have made to such a speech from the being for whose spiritual condition he acknowledged the highest responsibility would have been, "If that is so, I have done you a great wrong, and I ask you to forgive me." But though he was certainly feeling tolerably humbled, he could not quite bring himself to this, so he ignored the remark altogether.

Mattie would have respected him more for a reproof, with however little grace it might have come from him.

"I am frightened about this," he said. The despondency in his tone was little short of despair. "Everything ought to be so different; I know that. We shall be set as lights to the world—and our life—that ought to be a dwelling in the courts of the Temple—not to go out day or night. Well, I know our house is not so with

God. Do you suppose I haven't found out that in these two days? I know things aren't as I meant them to be when we started; but I want them to be different. And you—you can do anything with me—don't you understand how much you could help me?"

"I don't see that!" exclaimed Mattie, with some not unnatural indignation. "If we aren't so awfully religious all round as we might be, I don't see that *I'm* the one to come upon to put things right. A man ought not to want to be dragged around by his wife; I know enough of the Bible to know *that's* not Scripture, anyway! If there's to be any helping at all, it's you that ought to do it to me, not I to you."

He winced; it was the plainest speaking he had heard for years, external to his own conscience, but he was too much depressed just now to resent it.

"It would be easier for you than it would for me," he said, sadly rather than

reproachfully, "because you don't feel about me—care for me—like I do about you. I could see that all those weeks we were at——"

He stopped short; he had honestly meant never to say this, never even to allow it to haunt his thoughts. But every subject about which he could rightfully or wrongfully torment himself being just then uppermost, this had slipped out with the rest.

Mattie had just finished her preparations. She threw down the knife with a clatter, and pushed back the plates and dishes with angry vigour.

"Oh, Jesse, do try and not be so silly!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "It's just like the girls at Marston used to be one summer over their 'particular friends,' till Miss Grover said nobody was to be allowed to walk or stand about in twos for the next three months."

He looked dreadfully ashamed; more, perhaps, at his own failure than at her words.

"I beg your pardon," he said, humbly enough; "I ought not to have said it; and just now, of all times, when—I don't know how it is!"

"You ought not to get into such silly ways as could let such things into your head at all," said Mattie, not unwilling to improve the occasion. "I don't believe there's anybody in the place goes on like you do, and I suppose other folks are fond of each other, too. We should do well enough if you'd only be sensible."

For the life of her, in her present mood —though she really meant what she said, though her very words brought her a sort of shuddering memory—she could not resist the instinct of coquetry. She tossed her head, and turned half-aside, and looked back at him across her shoulder with a pout which scarcely hid a dimple, and a gleam in her saucy eyes that was very little like resentment.

His own eyes seemed to blaze up all in

a moment from the dimness of physical exhaustion, as a smouldering fire flares up at the touch of some spirituous liquor.

"I can't look at you, and be sensible!" he cried, with a rather pathetic passion. He made one great stride towards her, and fell on his knees beside her, clasping her round the waist, and kissed her beautiful bare arms all over, and held her tighter and tighter, dragging her down towards him; dumb all the while, though every breath was eloquent not so much of words as of an inarticulate cry.

Mattie struggled, with something very like terror.

"Let me go!" she cried between tears and laughter.

At her first movement he had done so; the whole had been an affair of some ten seconds. He stood up, trembling all over.

"There! you see," exclaimed Mattie. Already she spoke little more than pettishly, pulling into order, with conscious, petulant

touches, her dress which he had disarranged. "There! you see; that's just what I was saying!"

He threw himself upon the window-seat, and buried his face in his hands, and neither looked up nor spoke for many moments. The painted timepiece against the wall, gave its five minutes' preparatory whirr.

"Are you quite ready?" asked Mattie, "because it's just upon time to start." He lifted his head then.

"What shall I do?" he said, desperately. "I know harm will come of this! I'm not fit—it isn't safe—it will be no position for me! It is men under authority that should have others under them—I have none over myself, none at all. The lowest post—a slave's place, with the lash ready for every least slip—would be the place for me; it would be kindness to me—not this! Will they make me a keeper of the vineyard? me! Mine own vineyard have I not kept—and I can't!"

"Well!" said Mattie, sharply, "if you really think that, you'd better not go. After all, nobody can force you to against your will."

She certainly had no desire to persuade him; her words were the outcome of sheer impatience. But to him at this moment they were no other than the voice of conscience, and they brought him to a turning-point in his life. On the first instant his face seemed to clear up; it was the look of one who has found a solution. For his language, though tainted with his habitual exaggeration, did really represent, not his present excited feelings merely, but his convictions. He did unfeignedly dread a position for which everything that he found out about himself warned him he was unfit; everything—for once his eyes had been opened to one point he could see plenty. Yet he was so little practical that, till it was put into words for him, this simple way out of his difficulty had really never occurred to him.

It was, in fact, a great deal too obviously common-sense. But now he did, as in a flash, see absolutely and for certain what he ought to do. And for one moment he saw it with relief.

Yet—not to go! That is—to wait on, braving every wagging tongue in Beulah, till, in a day or two, a summons should arrive which, short of severing his connection with his community altogether, he could not refuse—a summons to an explanation. To go, then, in cold blood, to Cape Town, not as a hero, but as a culprit. To stand before his judges—tolerant they would be at first and half-amused, as at an over-strained scrupulosity, which yet did him honour. And then to confess; ay, and to confess not in general, sensational terms, but in such sober, unadorned detail as should best carry conviction, that he—the model, the saint, the very spiritual pride and pet of his sect, whose praise was in all the churches, was so weak, undisciplined and inconsistent,

as to be unfit for the least responsibility, less deserving of any sort of promotion, than was such a man as, say, Samuel Arkwright, for whose spiritual attainments Jesse had always cherished a great secret contempt. This was what not going meant, and more. A scandal—and worse, a ridiculous one; a humiliation so public that he could never hope to hold up his head again.

His very soul within him turned sick with the thought of the shame; his pride tasted the bitterness of death beforehand, and fought and prayed against the decree of conscience.

The clock jangled out the first stroke of eleven; Mattie looked out of the window.

"Come," she said, "there's the cart, just going round."

He stood up, and sat down again.

"Are you really not going?" she exclaimed. She spoke just then in mere incredulous surprise, but he heard in her tone everything that everybody would say.

He shivered—hesitated, then rose with a sort of despair, and walked to the door.

"Yes," he said, miserably, "I'm going."

Mattie took up the basket in which she had been packing the provisions, threw a cloth over her head, and they went down to the gate together.

He walked with his eyes fixed on the ground, and did not say another word. He got into the cart. It was a quiet enough departure; a few children loitering in the road—it was Saturday, so there was no school—grinned and nudged one another as the Baas drove off. There were no other witnesses. The minister had meant to come down, but, at the last moment, had been summoned elsewhere, and Beulah, to its credit be it said, was too busy a place to have any idlers about at that hour of the morning.

Mattie waved her hand; he made a gesture—it was farewell, entreaty, deprecation. She just caught the movement as

the cart turned round; the movement, and nothing of its significance.

The cart drove off down the embowered road, between the quince edges; a little cloud of yellow dust rose up around the wheels and round the horses' feet; soon a turn in the road hid all from sight.

Mattie stood looking, still, towards the point where it had disappeared, but her thoughts outstripped it far. Midday lay hot and still upon the land. The air was pierced and vibrant with the shrill ceaseless whirr of the crickets; now and again the children in the road called to one another in a louder tone than usual; there was no other sound. Between the trees, the opaline of the mountains showed tremulous through a quivering glassy haze of heat—those bounding mountains which for Mattie had already dissolved their prisoning bars and made a way for her life to escape. She stood holding to the gate with both hands—a child's attitude; and the dimples came and

went continually, one smile scarcely passed away before another was born; her little feet kept a sort of dancing movement on the gravel path.

"Only three weeks more of this!" she said to herself in her smiling.

CHAPTER XII.

On a certain day towards the end of April, Gerald Blake was sitting at a desk, in an office in Stockdale Street, Kimberley, reading the letters that had come by the afternoon delivery. The brass plate on the door, and the lettering on the wire blinds, announced the office as that of the Linone River Land Company, and the envelopes which he had just torn open were addressed to the Secretary of the same Company. The room itself was furnished like any other room of the same description; on the walls, besides the inevitable picture-advertisement of the mail-steamer, were diagrams representing geological formations, sketch

maps and plans, and one or two photographic views.

The letters which he opened—there were but two or three—did not seem to be of much importance. There was a report, which he glanced through hastily and filed; a prospectus, which he threw into the waste-paper basket. The third was addressed to G. Blake, Esq., and it was of a different description.

It was addressed, in that indefinite handwriting which the Principals of ladies' seminaries, some half-century ago, considered "elegant;" a running, sloping, flowing kind of writing, done with a very hard pen, and absolutely innocent of character. The envelope was of that yellow paper, with visible lines, a mild glaze, and a fancy edge, found in England, in sea-side repositories, and somehow associated with shell-pincushions; a nameless, but not faint, perfume exhaled from it, which also carried back the mind to the same spots.

"Where does the Koh-i-noor get her scent from?" muttered Gerald. He took up the letter fastidiously, with something between amusement and disgust; when he opened it there fell out a note, written on paper to match, and a printed circular. He proceeded to read the note.

"My Dear Mr. Blake,

"I am sorry to have to inform you that I am leaving home unexpectedly to-morrow. I had hoped to have paid my annual visit to my dear uncle, by Wynberg, after the Bazaar in June; but an unfortunate attack of illness has caused him to summon me sooner to his side. I shall (D.V.) be back in time for the Bazaar itself, but must miss, meanwhile, our pleasant gatherings of the Committee. I am very sorry. My place at the meetings will be kindly filled by Mrs. Runciman, and I am writing this to ask you kindly" (here the communication overflowed on to another sheet) "to make all

arrangements for the management and decoration of my stall, with her, all one as you would with me. She is a very nice lady and has great taste; I made her acquaintance last Christmas at Somerset Strand. She has only lately come to Kimberley, the Rev. Mr. Runciman having succeeded to the work so devotedly carried on among the poor heathen in the locations by the late excellent Mr. Phillips. Mrs. Van Eyssen desires her best compliments to you, and with the same from myself,

"I am, yours, very truly,

"SOPHY DE JONGH."

"*P.S.*—I detained this letter, expecting to have met you last night at Mrs. Nickerk's; but you were not there. I trust it was nothing unpleasant that detained you.

"*P.S.S.*—I send you the photograph you asked for; my friends think it good."

Blake threw down the third sheet of manuscript, and idly cut the string that secured the packet containing the object of his desires.

The portrait of the greatest heiress in Kimberley represented a young woman whose age it would have been difficult to guess. She was, in point of fact, four-and-twenty ; but she was so developed in form and so stolid in expression, that, judged merely by looks, she seemed at least five years older than her real age. Not exactly a bad-looking girl, only with nothing girlish about her ; nothing, that is, but a certain wooden simplicity, such as might have been gathered from her letter ; and even that was primitive rather than youthful. Everything about her was too heavy by far ; the very gown she had been taken in was fit for a matron of many years standing, and even such an one would have looked over-dressed in it. She wore a large locket and chain ; her sleeves were somewhat too tight, and

showed too much of substantial wrist, loaded with bracelets and bangles. She stood, with one hand on the back of a chair, and looked out of the picture with her rather heavy eyes opened upon the beholder: dull, gentle eyes; a wide, meek brow—and then, a mouth and chin in which the patient obstinacy of generations seemed to be resumed. A woman as meek as Griselda, and as tenacious as a bull-dog.

Gerald Blake looked for a few brief moments at the pictured face; looked carelessly, indifferently, yet not altogether idly. Presently he took up the unlucky letter, with its terrible perfume, and threw down the written sheet beside the photograph; and for a second or so his eyes wandered from one to the other, and back again, with a sort of purposeful, if lazy, criticism. Then he unlocked the desk and tossed the photograph into the drawer reserved for his own private affairs; the note he tore across and let it flutter into the basket at his feet. It

was as though he were dismissing a problem, which, as yet, had but a very abstract interest for him. The printed circular he just glanced at before placing it among the various papers in the letter-rack; most of these were cards of invitations for tennis, or "at homes." It was the announcement of a bazaar to be held in the Town Hall on the eighteenth of June; Mrs. Runciman's name appeared among the assistants at the flower-stall.

"'A very nice lady, with great taste,'" he quoted; "the Koh-i-noor is a good judge of that sort of thing!"

He looked at the memorandum tablet on the wall; there was a Committee meeting at four o'clock that afternoon. He rose, and prepared to go.

Gerald Blake to-day was not quite the same young man he had been on board ship. The plaintive languor which had marked his manner at that time had disappeared; his movements and bearing now were charac-

terized by something which, in him, might pass for alacrity. It was scarcely held to amount to this in Kimberley; there Mr. Blake was admired, in such quarters as he was admired at all, for his genteel repose. His expression, too, was reasonably contented; on the whole, it was to be supposed that, for once, his affairs were fairly prosperous, for he was not a person who ever turned upon Fortune a more smiling face than she deserved. Indeed, there was nothing more noticeable in Gerald than the rapidity with which he became demoralized under stress of ill-success, or even of insufficient appreciation; it seemed that he was not robust enough, even in vanity, to be able to dispense with outside testimony. Reasonably contented now, it is true, he was; but no more. Love of actual bodily ease, and an abundance of feminine adulation sufficed, for the present, to keep him where he was. But at the bottom of his heart he hated Kimberley, and all that

Kimberley contained; an Englishman of his particular stamp alone could know the utter revolt of his whole fastidious nature from the intense, bustling, crude colonialism of the place. Never, in the roughest and loneliest of his former experiences, had he felt himself more in exile.

He was on the very point of departing to keep his engagement, when he heard the door of the outer room open, and a voice there was no mistaking speaking to the office-boy. In another moment Westoby came in.

Gerald had not known that Westoby was, at that moment, within a hundred miles of Kimberley. Nominally, indeed, Kimberley had been his place of residence since long before his last return from Europe, but it was very rare to find him there for six weeks on end.

Whatever his business may have been, it seemed to entail incessant journeys; but it is likely that the need of working off some

of his superabundant physical energy had as much to do with his constant expeditions as had any real necessity.

However, it is true that people who knew, but who, for sufficient reasons, did not make any public parade of their knowledge, said amongst themselves that the Baas had altogether too many irons in the fire, and that the smash, which must come soon, would be colossal. But this had been said any time for the last five years, yet nothing had come of the prophecy. Smashes, indeed, there had been, but they had not touched him. More than one earthen vessel which had put to sea gaily enough, in the wake, or in the company of this iron pot, had come to irretrievable grief; but, to do him justice, none of them could have fairly taxed Westoby with being the active cause of their ruin. He had not, certainly, put out a finger to save them; he would not have thought of doing so, if even he had been much more indebted to his

various associates than he really was. He was of opinion that if people embarked on affairs which they had neither brain nor nerve to carry through, they were not worth saving, from any point of view. But he as little went out of his way to hurry on their fate, as he would have moved an inch to avert it.

Westoby came in with a good-humoured assurance of a favourable reception which a certain lack of enthusiasm in Blake's greeting did nothing to dispel. Gerald could scarcely have said why he would always rather have known Westoby to be anywhere sooner than in his own neighbourhood. It was not his want of polish, his even aggressive scorn of it, his roughness and coarseness, that repelled the younger man. Strange to say, Gerald Blake, so critical, so supercilious, never seemed to take exception, in this man, to things which, in anyone else, would have aroused his most intolerant disgust.

Neither, certainly, had he any practical

cause of complaint against his late fellow-traveller; quite the contrary. On the face of it he owed, and felt that he owed, a good deal to him. It was through Westoby, mainly, that he had got his present berth; a comfortable one, in which the pay, hitherto, had been as regular as it was handsome—very handsome indeed, it might have been thought for the amount of work the Secretary did for it. It was Westoby, too, who had invested his five hundred pounds for him. Gerald always retained an impression that he had been given elaborate explanations as to the nature of this investment; yet never, at any future time, was he able to recall clearly what they were. He troubled the less because, whatever it may have been, the result was so eminently satisfactory that, within two or three months, his capital had been nearly doubled.

After that first amazing haul, Westoby happened to be away for several weeks, and, in his absence, Gerald had embarked, on his

own account, upon speculations of which he was still awaiting the result. He had half wondered whether Westoby would resent the independence of the move : that such a thing should occur to him as possible gave a pretty clear indication of the kind of feeling it was which led him so greatly to prefer that gentleman's room to his company. But the Baas made no sign ; he never made any enquiries, direct or indirect, about the matter. To be sure, it was quite unnecessary for him to do so, seeing he knew perfectly well; but of this Gerald could not be aware.

"Some time since you saw me in these diggings, ain't it?" said Westoby. "Or anywhere else, for the matter of that."

"You have been away, I think?" said Gerald. "Have you been back long?"

"Only since yesterday. You're just off somewhere, by the look of it ; I won't keep you above a minute. I want to look over that last statement of accounts; ay, and that mining expert's report, while I'm about it."

Gerald went back to the desk, and unlocked it.

"Have you been up there lately?" he asked.

"There and elsewhere," said Westoby, widely.

"Is it all right?"

"Well, it didn't look any like running away last time I saw it. Land don't, as a rule, does it? Good steady-going sort of investment, that. But you had better run up and take a look for yourself; it's a long time since *you* were there."

"It's a beastly journey," grumbled Gerald.

"No end of a fine property, when you get there, though, ain't it?" said Westoby. He went up and looked at the views on the walls. These certainly represented a land "where every prospect pleases;" and how can a photograph lie? Nevertheless, what Westoby was thinking as he gazed was, "And a blessed good thing that countries ain't labelled, like railway-stations!"

"Oh, it's a good enough property," said Gerald; "of course, I could see that."

He spoke with little interest; and, indeed, his words were pretty well drowned by the rattle of keys in various locks, and a more and more impatient rustling of papers. Westoby turned round from contemplating a view of an ox-waggon crossing a *drift* across the *soi-disant* Linone River.

"Hulloa!" he said, "what's up? I didn't mean to make such a piece of work as that."

"It's no piece of work," said Gerald, angrily. "I can lay hands on the things in a minute, of course."

"Don't hurry for me, you know," said Westoby. He threw himself into the great leather chair opposite the desk, stretched out his legs, and began whistling some music-hall ditty.

Gerald tossed back a lot of loose papers into a large iron-bound box near the door in a way not calculated to facilitate any

future researches. He came back to the desk, which he had already reduced to a tolerable state of confusion, and, biting his lips with annoyance, he proceeded to look through it again, bitterly conscious of Westoby's eyes following his every movement. The small interior drawer in which he kept his own papers was half-open; the photograph of Miss de Jongh had got stuck crossways in it, and kept it from shutting. Gerald shook the drawer so impatiently that the whole affair came out with a jerk, and all the contents were scattered about the desk. He gathered them together in a great hurry, put them back, and shut the drawer.

Westoby offered no assistance; he sat with his hands in his pockets, his eyes apparently turned, now, to contemplate the toes of his boots; sat, and whistled cheerily — a colossal monument of easy, good-humoured repose. Yet he had not missed one item of any significance in his glimpse

of those papers ; not so much as the calculations scrawled here and there, in pencil, on the backs of envelopes, had escaped him.

"There!" exclaimed Gerald, the next moment, with as much satisfaction as though he had found them, blindfold, at the first attempt. "I knew I did put the precious things here ; there they are, both of them."

He threw over a bundle of papers to Westoby, who caught them, thanked him, and made no further remark on the subject. They walked together as far as the nearest cab-stand ; there Gerald called a cab.

"You're not going my way, I suppose?" he said, with an unsuccessful attempt at regret.

"Not in that thing, anyway, you bet," said Westoby. He drew himself up, expanding his great chest in a very luxury of vigorous freedom, nodded to Blake as the latter sprang into the cab, and then walked leisurely on in the direction of Beaconsfield.

"Just what old Solomon told me," he thought. "Outrunning the constable, and not a speculation sound of the whole boiling! But you've no time to lose, my lad. That game," he nodded towards a point supposed to represent the office, "that game's nearly played out, and then where will you be? That's the time for the bills to come in; and that's all you're likely to see come in at all. You'll have to make up your mind, you know; you can't go fooling around for ever. Let's see; here we are in May—call it May. Well, before Christmas, either old 'Jumper' de Jongh's heiress must be Mrs. Gerald Blake, or Mr. Gerald Blake will be stone-broke. That's how your chances stand, young woman. You're a fool to wish it; but if you do—bah! since half Kimberley knows you do—why, that's how they stand."

He paused to look in at a shop-window; then walked on at a quicker pace, and thought of that matter no more.

Meanwhile, Blake was driving on with a certain feeling of exhilaration. He did not care to examine the cause of this feeling too closely; not for worlds would he have admitted that it was largely due to a consciousness that he had got off very easily indeed, beyond anything that he expected. If there was one thing on earth that Gerald dreaded, with a secret, unacknowledged, but almost abject dread, it was Westoby's tongue; not so much his powers of invective—these, indeed, were exceptional. Even in Cape Dutch, a language possessing a copious and unique vocabulary of abuse, which can boast of many accomplished artists in this line among its adherents, Westoby yielded to none. To outdo some of them was, perhaps, impossible. But to Gerald this gift—though he could not be ignorant of it after having travelled with Westoby up country—was no terror at all compared with the Baas' powers of sarcasm. He did not suppose that

Westoby would ever venture to be violent with him ; but of his sarcasm, he had once enjoyed a specimen for his own benefit, and he had never forgotten it.

It had been in the early days of his experiences in Kimberley, when, unsettled, unemployed, miserable, Gerald had been beginning to go down hill very fast. Degradation of this kind was not natural to him ; he was too fastidious for it. If he could not ruin himself expensively and in style among his equals, he would not, as a rule, do it cheaply and nastily in the company to be found hanging about the bars of third-rate colonial hotels. He had to be very far gone on the road to despair before he took to that ; he was very far gone then.

Then Westoby turned up in Kimberley. He had not made any stay there on his first arrival, and Gerald had been left to his fate for nearly a month. Westoby came back, and took in the situation at a glance ; indeed, it was not a difficult one to discover.

He very soon settled matters; Gerald's chief value to him, at present, lay in his outward respectability, and that he was fast losing. He came in, one evening, to Blake's room, and there read him such a lecture as Gerald had never had in his life. He did not directly reprove him; he judged the time had scarcely come for so overt an assertion of authority: Westoby never made such assertions merely for the pleasure of doing so. But he talked at him, till Gerald was absolutely cowed. Westoby could use the word "gentleman," with all the effect of a lash, and he did not spare it. He spared nothing, indeed; he did not husband his resources at all. When he left his victim, at last, he left him resolved, for the time being at any rate, to bear anything, to make any exertion rather than expose himself to such a chastisement again.

Before the end of the week, Westoby had found him something to do; his present work, in fact. Immediately afterwards, he

insisted on Gerald's accompanying him up country at once, to inspect the Company's property—or what passed muster for it—and, very much against his will, Gerald had gone. Westoby never travelled luxuriously, and he certainly did not go out of his way to make this particular expedition any more comfortable than need be. By the time they got back, Gerald was set up again; better, probably, than he had been for years, for it was the first time since he had left school that he had been under any approach to discipline.

He came back with the old associations broken; Westoby started him fair. Such of the directors as lived in Kimberley were very civil to him; he was constantly at their houses, and very soon introductions began to flow in. If the society to which he was introduced was not absolutely the most aristocratic in the place, it held, at least, a respectable second rank. In this matter it was not, of course, Westoby who appeared

as prime mover; though how many of the strings he may have held secretly was a matter on which no one who knew him would have cared to dogmatize.

But to all appearance, once he had got Blake settled, he retired very much into the background, so far as Gerald was concerned; and that was how matters stood at the present time.

CHAPTER XIII.

Mrs. Greathead's drawing-room, in which some eight or ten members of the Bazaar Committee were that afternoon assembled, did not give the idea of being a very habitable place. There was about it that air of being reserved for functions, which tends to solemnize the spirits of the ordinary visitor.

There was a round and very shiny table in one corner, with a wool-mat in the centre, and on this an epergne, mounted in electro-plate, and filled with everlastings—dyed violet, magenta, and emerald-green—mingled with a few stalks of metallic-looking brown grasses. All round this were disposed

photographic albums, and little blue and scarlet books of folding views: "Remembrances" of Grahamstown, of Port Elizabeth —even of Brighton, for Mrs. Greathead had been "home;" colonials born and bred, seldom speak of the old country by any colder name.

The chairs and the sofa were all arranged round the walls, and it never seemed to occur to any of the occupants to try and group themselves, any more than they would do in church. There was a shiny cottage piano at the opposite corner to the shiny table; a few transcriptions of American melodies, a little dance music, and some rather untidy songs, together with a copy of Sankey's hymns, gave the measure of the musical tastes of the two Misses Greathead. On the walls, which were papered in white and gold, hung one or two oleographs in gilt frames, a few fancy brackets and some Japanese fans and pincushions. There was a good deal of general

impression of little bits of art muslin and ribbon all about the room; a sheep-skin karross, thrown down in front of the sofa, and a Kafir cushion—an elaborate patch-work of buck-skins, fawn and white and black—in one of the arm-chairs, looked out of keeping, without giving any distinct flavour to the general effect.

The members were sitting in twos or threes, leaving gaps along the circle. They were talking to one another, but there was not much animation about their manner; they seemed to be not so much weary of waiting, as intent upon it to a degree which left their minds scarcely free for other things.

"Don't you think we might as well begin?"

There was a general movement of heads and eyes towards the speaker, as though she had proposed an enormity.

"Mr. Blake hasn't come yet," said Mrs. Greathead. There was a simple finality

about the tone of this remark, which touched upon grandeur.

The leader of the opposition took out her watch. She was an exceedingly quiet-looking, neat, rather a pretty little woman; a woman whom no one would have credited with the grown-up daughters she possessed. A colonial of English descent, from the Eastern Province, who had married into a Cape family, she had been about a year in Kimberley—a place she cordially detested. She had a way of uttering sarcasms in a gentle drawl, and with an unobtrusive, uninterested manner, which no one ever knew how to take.

"Well," she said, "I have my husband's nephew staying with me just now, and I had almost thought of trespassing on your kindness, to bring him this afternoon."

"I'm sure we should have been delighted, Mrs. Hofmeyer; shouldn't we, girls?" said the lady of the house; she always appealed to her daughters when she was at all

nervous, and with Mrs. Hofmeyer no one ever felt very sure of their ground.

"You are most kind; there is nothing he would have enjoyed more," drawled that lady. "But I am afraid we should have quite spoiled his morals, amongst us; so it is better not."

"How do you mean?"

"Christian," she said, "is, at present, a singularly meek young man, a young man who knows his place, I may say. They do turn them out so, sometimes, from the college at Stellenbosch. I do believe he has never yet realized that he is a lord of creation. How sad if he should have first learned this demoralizing fact from anything he might have seen this afternoon!"

Everyone laughed a little, from not knowing what else to do. But one girl laughed as if she understood; as if, even, she were grateful; would have liked to take the same line openly, herself. Her eyes met Mrs. Hofmeyer's; they were dark eyes and passionate,

as little like the rather cold grey ones into which they looked as could be.

"Miss Solomon," said Mrs. Hofmeyer, answering them, "agrees with me, I know; but I'm afraid we are the only disciplinarians in the room."

"Don't let anybody call you names, Dora dear," called out a jolly-looking old lady, seated at the opposite end of the room. She was the chaperon of the flower-stall, and was not, herself, to all appearance, a person likely to be oppressively vigilant over her subordinates. "Don't let anybody call you names."

"I never do," said Dora, quietly; and to look at her anyone would have easily believed it. "But I think that is rather a good one."

"Quite a mistake, my dear; quite a mistake!" retorted old Mrs. Johnson. "Look at Sophy de Jongh, now. I like Sophy, with all my heart; a dear, good, kind girl she is, but everyone knows she's

the sort that can't say 'Bo to a goose.' And yet—— Well, I put it to everybody, were we ever kept waiting—by somebody as shall be nameless—when the meetings were at her house?"

This time the joke was within the reach of the company in general, and they honoured it accordingly. But if a young lady in a nineteenth century drawing-room ever looked little short of murder, Dora Solomon did so, for one instant then. Mrs. Hofmeyer caught that look; a sort of cold sympathy came into her face. She came across to the girl and asked her some question about the business of the afternoon, keeping her in talk a while.

"Did you see her look at me?" said Mrs. Johnson, in a lower voice, to a very unintelligent-looking elderly person beside her. "I knew that would put her back up! She hates Sophy like poison; but nothing like she hates Sophy's beau."

"If she hates Sophy's beau, I don't

see why she should hate Sophy," said the unintelligent friend, in a matter-of-fact voice. "Of course, girls will be girls; but I don't see the common-sense of that; because, if she hates him, she can't want to have him."

"Oh, that's not Dora; she would never cut off her nose to spite her face—trust her father's daughter for that! She'd forgive him enough to take him, if he'd have her, fast enough; but what sort of a time he'd have afterwards, I don't know."

"But why does she hate him?"

"Well, you *do* go about with your head in a bag, my dear!" exclaimed Mrs. Johnson, who did not. "Don't you know that? Well, one day last month, Mr. Blake was at the Club, and a lot of young fellows were chaffing him about Miss de Jongh; and, by-and-bye, Dora Solomon's name came up, too. They said her brains and old Solomon's business—and it's always my belief that Miss Dora knows more

about the working of that than she gets credit for—would be worth more, in the long run, than Sophy's money. And then, Mr. Blake—you know how he talks—said, 'That might be, but he must really draw the line at Jewesses.'"

"Dear, dear!" said the friend. She had taken in the whole of this circumstantial narrative with unshaken faith. The story that can prove too improbable, too devoid of evidence, to be received with open arms by South African society must be an amazing one indeed. Probably, it still remains to be told.

"So the young fellow that's engaged to Adelaide Cohen's cousin told his girl; and she told Adelaide; and Adelaide told that Miss McKay that teaches Alice Thorne's little sisters; and Alice is hand and glove with Dora, always in and out, and so it came round to her. And that's why."

"Dear, dear!" said the friend, again. "It was a nasty thing to have said about

one, wasn't it? He could scarcely have said any different about a coloured person."

"Oh, well! of course, he never thought of its coming round. After all, perhaps, he never did say it; people do put stories about so," said Mrs. Johnson, with a touch of resigned reprobation. "Well, talk of an angel! Here he is."

In fact, a general relaxation of tension notified the arrival of Mr. Gerald Blake.

"I must make my humblest apologies, Mrs. Greathead," he said, easily. "I was on the very point of starting when I was detained."

"Oh, don't mention it, Mr. Blake," said Mrs. Greathead, with shocked deprecation. "I'm sure nobody knows better than me what calls gentlemen in business have on their time. Poor Mr. Greathead used always to tell me and the girls never to count on him for anything—except for meals. Till his health broke down, he used to manage to be wonderfully regular

at those. But as for anything else—No; I'm sure we all feel it's only too good of you to come at all."

The flutter of assent was so general that it might easily have passed for universal.

Gerald continued his progress, with a few words to each, till he came to Mrs. Johnson. That lady took the initiative. There was a rich exuberance of vulgarity about her that used to make Gerald shudder; but a wholesome dread of her exceptional imaginative powers as a narrator induced him to make more efforts to keep in her good graces than he usually did where his tastes were offended.

"Are your ears burning, Mr. Blake?" she shouted. "Because they ought to be, the way they've all been talking about you."

"I hope nobody was very hard on me," he said, plaintively. "Hadn't I any defenders? Didn't you stand up for me, Miss Greathead?"

Miss Greathead, elaborately patting into shape a dab of muslin on the back of Mrs. Johnson's chair, wished, giggling, to know why she should, indeed?

"Oh! don't you say anything, my dear," cried the terrible old lady. "It's compliments he's fishing for. Wouldn't you like to know what was said? Come!"

"Was it too bad for anybody to tell me?" said Gerald, pathetically. "Mrs. Hofmeyer, won't *you* be plain with me for my good, and let me know?" he said, crossing over to her.

Mrs. Hofmeyer, in secret, gladly would have done so, so far as her part in it was concerned; but she only gave her little outward smile, and that mechanical touch of her hand, which she was able to reduce to even more than the usual unmeaningness.

"Comfort yourself," she said; "I didn't hear any libel."

"The greater the truth the greater the

libel, you know," persisted Gerald. "Didn't you hear any truth?"

"Probably not," she said, coolly. She gave an infinitesimal glance towards Mrs. Johnson, whose late anecdote had been but too well pointed by her eyes, though her tones had not reached Mrs. Hofmeyer's ears. "Probably not. We don't come together to talk anything so dull; do you think so? It would be worse than business."

"Oh! why do you say worse?" he said, rather glad of the diversion. "Surely there is nothing so dreadful in what we do here? I call it 'business made easy.' I'm sure it is business made pleasant," he added, with one of his best smiles, turning to embrace the company in a general compliment.

"Indeed, *we* all find it business made pleasant, don't we, ladies?" said Mrs. Greathead as choragus.

And the chorus said they did.

"Miss Thorne, you don't dislike business, do you?" said Gerald.

The two girls sat together, the last of the circle.

"Miss Solomon, you can't, surely? No one could dislike what they do so well."

"I'm glad you think so," said the girl, with a little laugh. It was a curious one; less agreeable than perhaps she would fain have made it. "I shouldn't have guessed it; you're generally rather down upon my suggestions, you know."

Gerald muttered something deprecatory, rather wishing he had held his tongue. She took no heed; anyone that understood the situation could have discerned the struggle between temper and policy in every detail of her face and manner.

"No," she said, then, with a sudden resolute good-humour, "the person that really is good at the business—that really does go in for it as if she liked it—won't be here to-day, I'm afraid. Miss de Jongh isn't coming any more, you know."

On her first entrance, she had taken care

to fill up the empty chair beyond her with the wrap she had just taken off. Now, as she spoke, she took it up, as if by accident, and threw it over the end of the sofa; yet not so accidentally either as to leave the action entirely unmarked.

"Indeed, you do her no more than justice, Miss Solomon," said Gerald. "Miss de Jongh is a principal under whom it is a pleasure to work. By-the-bye, she has appointed a lieutenant; I must go and find her out, as the best means left me of showing my obedience."

He strolled away. Dora turned her back on the place of repentance which she had offered and he had refused, looking as though she could have cut off the hand that had offered it. The next moment she was speaking to Alice, in a voice as composed as usual.

"You look a bit lost, Mr. Blake," said Mrs. Johnson, as Gerald stood looking round the room. "Who might you be missing?"

"Is Mrs. Runciman here? Miss de Jongh has passed me on to her, and I am naturally interested."

"Oh! yes, you would be," exclaimed the old lady. She began to chuckle, as at a secret joke. "Well, you'll have to wait a bit; she's gone up with Florrie Greathead to have a look at the pattern of the costume for the helpers at the flower-stall. You know she's one of my lot, now; I'm her boss, so you'll have to mind."

She nudged the mild friend beside her, and chuckled louder.

"I don't believe it," said Gerald, gallantly; "I believe it's only printed so to save your feelings, Mrs. Johnson, and that really they have found someone to keep you in order."

"Hark at that!" shrieked the old lady, in a perfect ecstacy. "Mrs. Runciman's coming to boss me up!"

The shout of her laughter was taken up in every variety of tone. It ceased.

"After that——" began Mrs. Johnson. And then somebody laughed, outside; and Gerald Blake fairly started. It was as if some celestial mocking-bird, gathering up the too discordant tones within, had sent them back purified and etherialized into melody. The next moment, two girls, coming in together, stood pausing by the open door.

For some reason, Mattie had come down wearing the dainty fancy cap and apron which she had been up to inspect. They were pretty in themselves; and, for her, if an artist had designed them expressly, the effect could scarcely have been improved. It would have been pleasant to see almost any young thing so simply, manifestly delighted, with itself and with the whole situation, as was Mattie. When, to the mere attractiveness of happy youth, was added the beauty, the half voluptuous yet piquant charm, with which every soft line, every pretty preening movement of this

child-woman, was instinct, the picture was one not readily to be forgotten.

"I thought you would like to see——" began Mattie. And then: "Oh! Mr. Blake, how d'ye-do? I didn't see you were here." She held out her hand with a suppressed giggle. "You didn't expect to see me, now, did you?"

"Miss Williams!" he exclaimed. He was fairly bewildered out of comprehension for a moment.

"Mrs. Runciman, if you please!" said that lady.

The pretty petulant movement of her head was like that of a bird. Her manner betrayed no sign of confusion; she was fairly laughing in his face like a mischievous school-girl. But one brilliant, passing blush did not escape the notice of a pair of dark eyes suddenly become attentive.

The explanations which the faces of everyone asked and which Mrs. Johnson's voice loudly called for, were given; and

then Mattie bethought her of the rest of her own.

"I was going to say, Mrs. Johnson, that I thought you'd like to see how the things looked on."

"Eh?" cried Mrs. Johnson. "Oh! you'll do, my dear, you'll do. It's not a farthing under five pounds a day you should be worth to the stall, eh?"

Mattie did not trouble herself to try and look as if she did not understand; she dropped her little school curtsey, and laughed aloud. She could have danced, she could have kissed her chaperon. Now that the encounter for which she had been looking for days, ever since she had received the circular, was over, she was in wild spirits; an excitement had taken possession of her, beyond what she realized or understood.

Gerald Blake glanced round the room, and his eyes came back to her.

"It's worth all England to an acre of the Karroo, to look at you, now," he said

in a low voice. And his looks so justified even the fervour of his words, that Mattie began to giggle, and blushed again, more vividly than she could have wished.

"Well, I'll take the things off now," she said, rather quickly. "It would be a pity to take the freshness off them."

She went across to the piano, as a safe place to deposit her finery. Gerald followed her.

"Let me help you," he said.

"It's done, thank you," said Mattie, demurely; and in two turns of her deft little hands it was done: cap and apron were off, and folded, and laid on the top of the pile of music. Then she looked at him provokingly, and laughed.

"She's prettier than ever," thought Gerald; "and, by Jove, how she has come on!"

And so she had, terribly; yet naturally enough, too.

"You won't be able to do without me,

by-and-bye, you know," he said, aloud; or, at least, loud enough for her. "Miss de Jongh said I was to do business with you, just the same as I do with her."

"Oh! and how is that?" giggled Mrs. Runciman; and, somehow, he could not feel such absolute certainty of the simplicity of the question as to be quite so ready as usual with his reply.

"She tells me what to do, and I do it," he said, ultimately, with innocent humility. "I am very obedient."

"You've changed a lot, then," retorted Mattie, with a delightful pertness. "But if that's it, you'll have an easy time with me; because I don't really know anything about it, you see; I never was at a bazaar in all my life."

"You delight me!" he exclaimed. "This is better and better. You have taste——"

"Who told you that?"

"Why should I want anyone to tell

me? You have the taste, and I have the experience. We are like the blind and the lame man in the story; we can't either manage without the other, I assure you."

"Oh, I know that old story; it was in our reading-books at school. But it has nothing to do with this, any way."

"Oh, but I think it has. I would like it to have," he said, insinuatingly.

"Folks can't always get what they like in this world?" said Mrs. Runciman, sententiously.

"You needn't tell me that," said Gerald. He spoke most unnecessarily low; but this did not prevent him from giving the fullest and most suggestive emphasis to every syllable of this remark. Nor were his eyes inefficient as a commentary.

She simply laughed; not the faintest touch of consciousness could he flatter himself with, even in imagination. If she had blushes to spare for unfeigned admiration, it was evident that she had none

for mock sentiment. If she had learned nothing else since they parted, she had learned, at least, how genuine passion looks, and sighs, and speaks.

Gerald felt a little disgusted at his failure; just enough so to put him on his honour, to himself, to get something more of a response out of her before he had done. For the present, he thought it best to laugh too.

And just then, Mrs. Hofmeyer was heard saying, in a tone of penetrative meekness:

"And *now*, don't you think we might get to business?"

Mr. Blake followed Miss de Jongh's lieutenant to a chair, and business began.

If Gerald did not find it pleasant indeed that afternoon, his looks, his manner, very much belied him. It soon appeared that Mrs. Runciman did really know very little about the affairs she was supposed to be directing. This necessitated a great deal of

private and particular explanation; and, not to disturb the general business of the meeting, this had to be given in an undertone; and this, again, necessitated sitting very close to his director, suddenly become his disciple.

Presently there came some question of decoration—a matter of folds and draperies—and Mrs. Runciman's little red shawl came into requisition; and Mr. Blake took much trouble to drape it over the back of Mrs. Runciman's chair. He actually had to kneel down by it to get it really artistic; and then he took his work to pieces, and she had to do it again, to show she understood; and she could not manage it, so he was obliged to guide her hands; and then—then Mattie suddenly tossed the shawl on to the floor, and declared she could understand a lot better just by listening, and folded her hands on her lap very demurely, and began to listen very hard. And Gerald sat up, and pulled his moustache, and looked

pleased with himself; and, without prejudice to his attention to Miss de Jongh's substitute, made himself extra agreeable to the general public for the rest of the afternoon.

Dora Solomon sat on the sofa, and showed very little of her head for business. She remained quite silent; with her arm resting against the head of the couch, and her cheek resting on her hand, she sat looking across the room, with a sort of inward, concentrated gaze—a look strangely dispassionate to go with such a temperament.

"What's the matter, Dora?" said Alice Thorne, at last, giving her a little push.

"Nothing; what should there be? Why do you ask?"

"Because you look just like you do when you are playing chess."

"Do you play chess, Miss Solomon?" asked Mrs. Hofmeyer. She spoke with a certain curiosity.

Dora laughed, a little awkwardly.

"Oh! now and then," she said.

"Oh! Mrs. Hofmeyer," exclaimed Alice, who was that doubtful blessing—a devout worshipper. "Why, she has beaten Monty Lyons at it, before now; and there's only three men in Kimberley can do that."

"What nonsense you do talk, Alice!" said the other girl, very sharply. Then she recovered herself. "It's not much compliment to be told that you look wisest when you are half asleep," she said laughing, "and that's what *I* was. Goodness! how dull it is. Well, I suppose I must keep awake to do my duty by Sophy."

She took out a little memorandum book and a pencil.

"Tell me if anything has been settled yet, there's a good girl," she said; "and I'll make a note of that before I go on. Sophy made me promise faithfully to write her a full account of what was done at every meeting."

"Well, you won't need to write to-day,"

said Alice, "because nothing has been settled, or seems likely to be, any different to what there was before."

"That is no matter," said Dora, absently. She had turned to listen to some pronouncement of Mrs. Greathead's, and was entering it in her note-book. "It will be better to write," she went on, as she set down the information she had acquired in a firm, marked hand; "you know, it does take a lot of telling, to get anything into poor Sophy's head. I daresay she doesn't clearly know what was settled last time."

END OF VOL. I.

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